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A N
Humble Attempt
TOWARDS THE
R E V I V A L
O F
PRACTICAL RELIGION
A M O N G
CHRISTIANS,
BY A
SERIOUS ADDRESS
T O
MINISTERS and PEOPLE,

In some Occasional Discourses.

By *I. WATTS*, D. D.

The THIRD EDITION.

L O N D O N :

Printed for JAMES BRACKSTONE, at
the *Globe* in Cornhill. 1742.



THE P R E F A C E.

AMong the Papers published last Year, there hath been some Enquiry made, whether there be any Decay of the Dissenting Interest and what may be supposed to have been the Occasion of it. So far as I have searched into that Matter, I have been informed; that whatsoever Decrease may have appeared in some Places, there have been sensible Advances in others. And without entering into any Debate about the particular Reasons of its Declension in any Town whatsoever *, I am well satisfied that the great and general Reason is the Decay of vital Religion in the Hearts and Lives of Men, and the little Success which the Ministrations of the Gospel have had of late for the Conversion of Sinners to Holiness, and the Recovery of them, from the State of corrupt Nature and the Course of this World, to the Life of God by Jesus Christ. If this be not our Hope and Design, the Support of the Dissenting Interest is but of little Importance. What is it that we mean by asserting the Rights and Freedom of Conscience in our Separation from the established

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Church,

* This whole Affair is set in the best Light in a little Pamphlet, entitled, *Free Thoughts on the most probable Means of Reviving the Dissenting Interest, occasioned by a late Enquiry into the Causes of its Decay*: Printed for R. Hett in the Poultry. 1730.

Church, but more effectually to promote the Kingdom of God amongst Men, to do more Honour to the Name of Christ our Saviour in his Institutions, and better to carry on the blessed Work of the Salvation of Souls ?

But if these Things are not happily promoted amongst us, 'tis no wonder that Persons release themselves from all the Inconveniencies that in some Places may attend their Separation from a publick Establishment, especially when 'tis so evident that the Allurements of Riches and Honours, and publick Trusts and Offices lie all on that Side.

Nor is the Complaint of the Declension of Virtue and Piety made only by the Protestant Dissenters: 'Tis a general Matter of mournful Observation amongst all that lay the Cause of God to Heart: And therefore it cannot be thought amiss for every one to use all just and proper Efforts for the Recovery of dying Religion in the World. And since something may be done amongst the Ministers, and something among the People, to attain this desirable End, I have been persuaded to publish these following Exhortations or Addresses which are directed both to the one and the other.

The Exhortation to Ministers was composed at the Request of my worthy Friend and Brother Mr. John Oakes, and designed to have been delivered at his publick Ordination in the Congregation of dissenting Protestants at Cheshunt in Hertfordshire, on November 12th, 1729

But

P R E F A C E.

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But the Providence of God prevented me from fulfilling that Service by confining me to a Bed of Sickness on that Day. In the Composition of that Discourse my Thoughts ran out to four or five Times the Length of what would have been sufficient for that Service, so that I must have greatly contracted it in the Delivery: But being much importuned both by my Reverend Brother, who has perused far the greatest Part of it, and by the Congregation now under his Care, to make it publick, I have revised it with a larger View, and humbly hope that my younger Brethren in the Ministry may be in some Measure excited and encouraged hereby to do their Part toward the Revival of decaying Piety. 'Tis expressly with this View and Design, that my worthy Friend Mr. David Some in Leicestershire published an excellent Sermon last Year, the Perusal whereof I would heartily recommend to all my Brethren.

The following Exhortation to the People was delivered in several Discourses to the Congregation which I serve in the Gospel; and I would hope it has made some serious Impressions on the Minds of those who heard it, since it had been much desir'd that they might have a Review of it by the Assistance of the Press. Among the many Motives which may be urged upon the Consciences of our Hearers, in order to awaken them to strengthen the Things that remain and are ready to die, I thought it not improper to borrow some Arguments for this purpose from

from their own Profession as Protestant Dissenters, and as separating from the established Worship of the Nation: And this I have done without entering into a Detail of all the Grounds of our Practice, or vindicating the Cause of Nonconformity, which has been sufficiently performed by other Writers. While we quit all the outward Advantages of the national Establishment by worshipping in separate Assemblies, 'tis presumed in the Nature of Things, that we do it (or at least that we should do it) upon the Prospect of some better Advantages for Religion; and we hereby also lay our selves under special Obligations to make the best Improvement of these real or supposed Advantages.

But this particular Motive relating to the Dissenters is pursued only in the middle Part of that Discourse: The first and the latter Sections of it are of equal Concern and Importance to Protestants of every Name and Party: The Sense and Style are suited to common Understandings: Novelties and Elegancies are less needful, where the Writer's whole Aim is to charge and impress the Conscience with the plain Rules and Duties of practical Religion. And, may the Spirit of God, by his heavenly Influences, render what was design'd sincerely for the Revival of real Godliness amongst us all, effectual to attain this blessed End!

There is no Party of Christians whatsoever, who have Liberty to chuse their own Way of Worship, but pretend they are blessed with
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some special Advantages for the Service of God, and their Increase in Piety or Virtue beyond their Neighbours ; and these pretended Advantages lay them under proportionable Obligations of Duty. A great Part of this Address which I have made to our People tends to enforce every sort of Engagement upon their Consciences, and to excite them to superior Degrees of Holiness ; and 'tis the sincere Desire of my Soul, that our Brethren of the Church of England also may improve to the utmost all their publick Privileges of every kind for the Increase of Virtue and Religion. May every Denomination of Christians in the Land maintain a holy Emulation with each other, which of us shall run swiftest in the Course of the Christian Life, and make the most eminent Advances toward the heavenly World ! Amen.

April 2, 1731.

A

TABLE of the CONTENTS.

<i>A</i>	<i>Exhortation to Ministers from Col. iv. 17.</i>	
	Take heed to the Ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it	Page 1
S E C T. I.	<i>Of a Minister's personal Religion</i>	3
	II. <i>Of a Minister's private Studies</i>	11
	III. <i>Of his publick Ministrations</i>	72
	IV. <i>Of the Conversation of a Minister</i>	80
	V. <i>A solemn Enforcement of these Exhortations on the Conscience</i>	92
<i>A</i>	<i>serious Address to the People from Matth. v. 47</i>	
	What do you more than others?	
S E C T. I.	<i>The Text applied to the Disciples</i>	108
	II. <i>The Application of the Text to our own Age and Circumstances</i>	116
	III. <i>The Advantages of Protestant Dissenters in Matters of Religion</i>	138
	IV. <i>Of the Obligation of Protestant Dissenters to greater Degrees of Holiness</i>	186
	V. <i>Peculiar Practices of Piety and Virtue among the ancient Nonconformists</i>	213
	VI. <i>An Enumeration of several Advantages for Piety which may be found among some Christians of every Party</i>	236
	VII. <i>Special Obligations which lie upon some Christians of every Party</i>	262
	VIII. <i>General Persuasives to superior Degrees of Piety proportionable to our Advantages and Obligations.</i>	279



A N

HUMBLE ATTEMPT, &c.

An EXHORTATION to Ministers.

WHEN true Religion falls under a general and remarkable Decay, 'tis time for all that are concerned to awaken and rouse themselves to fresh Vigour and Activity in their several Posts of Service. If the Interests of Piety and Virtue are things fit to be encouraged and maintained in the World, if the Kingdom of the blessed God among Men be worthy to be supported; surely it is a necessary and becoming Zeal for every one who hath the Honour to be a Minister of this Kingdom, to take Alarm at the Appearance of such Danger; and each of us should enquire, What can I do *to strengthen the Things which remain and are ready to die*, as well as to recover what is lost? Let my Brethren therefore in the Ministry forgive me, if I presume at this Season to set before them a plain and serious Exhortation.

It was prepared for a publick Solemnity, wherein an esteem'd young Friend and Brother enter'd into the Ministerial Office; and

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upon

upon this Account I have used much more Freedom in the Language than I could ever pretend to justify on any other Occasion. 'Twas in the Name of my Reverend Brethren then present, as well as in my own, that the Exhortation address'd him in the Manner following.

You have this Day devoted and dedicated yourself to the Service of *Christ* in the Ministry of the Gospel, and particularly for the Edification of this Church. Your Brethren in the Ministry have also done all that they can do toward the dedicating and devoting you to the same sacred Service, by the various solemn Transactions of the Day; and now we entreat, we exhort, we charge you in the Name of our Lord *Jesus Christ*, and in the Words of the great Apostle, that you *take heed to the Ministry which you have received in the Lord that you fulfil it*, Col. iv. 17.

While we are endeavouring to press this Charge on your Conscience, we would speak also, each of us, to our own Souls, and renew the awful Charge upon our selves. We would call to mind our own Vows and Engagements this Day, and revive our decaying and dying Zeal in this sacred and important Service.

What I have to say on this Subject shall be contained under four general Heads.

Of a Minister's personal Religion. 3

I. Take heed to your own personal Religion, as absolutely necessary to the right Discharge of the Ministerial Office.

II. Take heed to your private Studies and Preparations for public Service.

III. Take heed to your public Labours, and actual Ministrations in the Church.

IV. Take heed to your Conversation in the World, and especially among the Flock of *Christ* over which you preside. Bear with me while I enlarge a little upon each of these.

SECTION I.

Of a Minister's personal Religion.

I. **T**ake heed to your own personal Religion, especially to the Work of God in your own Heart, as absolutely necessary to the right Discharge of the Ministerial Office.

Surely there is the highest Obligation on a Preacher of the Gospel to believe and practise what he preaches. He is under the most powerful and sacred Engagements to be a Christian himself, who goes forth to persuade the World to become Christians. A Minister of *Christ* who is not a hearty Believer in *Christ*, and a sincere Follower of him, is a most shameful and inconsistent Character, and forbids in Practice what he recommends in Words and Sentences.

4 *Of a Minister's personal Religion.*

But 'tis not enough for a Minister to have a common Degree of Piety and Virtue, equal to the rest of Christians ; he should transcend and surpass others. The Leaders and Officers in the Army of the blessed *Jesus* should be more expert in the Christian Exercises, and more advanced in the holy Warfare, than his Fellow-Soldiers are supposed to be, 2 *Cor.* vi. 4. *In all things approving ourselves* (saith the Apostle) *as the Ministers of God in much Patience, &c.* and I may add, In much of every Christian Grace. A little and low Degree of it is not sufficient for a Minister ; see therefore not only that you practise every Part and Instance of Piety and Virtue which you preach to others, but abound therein, and be eminent beyond and above the rest, as your Station in the Church is more exalted, and as your Character demands.

The World expects more from you, your own Conscience requires more of you, and *Christ* your Lord both requires and expects much more Religion to be found in you, who are the Leader, than in the rest of his Flock, since your Advantages are much superior to most of theirs.

Your Time and Life are in a special Manner devoted to the Things of God and Religion, and the heavenly World : Your *particular Calling* as a Minister is much nearer a-kin to your *general Calling* as a Christian, than

Of a Minister's personal Religion. 5

than that of the rest of Mankind, and you ought to improve it for the Advancement of your Christianity. You are more disengaged from the busy Cares and Embarrassments of this Life than other Christians, that you may have your Heart and Soul more entirely employed in Things that relate to the Life to come.

Your daily Duty calls you to be more conversant with the Word of God, with the Rules of Piety and the Gospel of Salvation: The Precepts which require universal Godliness, and the Promises that encourage it, are better known to you, and your Mind is better furnished with them, or at least it should be so.

You are obliged to copy out the Life of *Christ* more exactly, that you may be an Example to the Flock in every Thing that is holy.

Your Temptations to a vain and worldly Spirit, and a sensual Temper of Mind are much fewer than those of many other Men, whose Hearts and Hands are necessarily busied in the Affairs of the World, and who are more frequently constrained into the Company of Sinners.

Now since your Helps in the Way to Heaven, both as to the Knowledge and Practice of Duty, are much greater than what others enjoy, and your Obstacles and Impediments are in some Instances less than

6 *Of a Minister's personal Religion.*

theirs, it will be a shameful thing in you, as it is a Matter of Shame to any of us, to sink below the Character of other Christians in the practice of our holy Religion, or even if we do not excel the most of them, since our Obligations to it, as well as our Advantages for it, are so much greater than others.

Take heed therefore to your own practical and vital Religion, as to the *Truth, Reality,* and *Evidence* of it, as to the *Liveliness* and *Power* of it, as to the *Growth* and *Increase* of it.

I. Take heed to your own practical Religion, *to the Truth and Reality of it, and the clear and undoubted Evidence of it to your own Conscience.* Give double Diligence to *make your Calling and Election sure.* See to it with earnest Solicitude, that you be not mistaken in so necessary and important a Concern; for a Minister who preaches up the Religion of *Christ*, yet has no Evidence of it in his own Heart, will lie under vast Discouragements in his Work; and if he be not a real Christian himself, he will justly fall under double Damnation. Keep a constant holy Jealousy over your own Soul, *lest while you preach to the eternal Salvation of others, yourself become a Cast-away,* or disapproved of God, and for ever banished from his Presence, 1 Cor. ix. 27.

Call your own Soul often to Account; examine the Temper, the Frame, and the Motions of your Heart with all holy Severity,

Of a Minister's personal Religion. 7

rity, so that the Evidences of your Faith in *Jesus*, and your Repentance for Sin, and your Conversion to God, be many and fair, be strong and unquestionable; that you may walk on with Courage and joyful Hope toward Heaven, and lead on the Flock of *Christ* thither with holy Assurance and Joy.

II. Take heed to your own Religion, *as to the Liveliness and Power of it.* Let it not be a sleepy thing in your Bosom, but sprightly and active, and always awake. Keep your own Soul near God in the way in which you first came near him, *i. e.* by the Mediation of *Jesus Christ*. Let no Distance or Estrangement grow between God and you, between *Christ* and you. Maintain much Converse with God by Prayer, by reading his Word, by holy Meditation, by Heavenly-mindedness, and universal Holiness in the Frame and Temper of your own Spirit. Converse with God and with your own Soul in the Duties of secret Religion, and walk always in the World as under the Eye of God. Every Leader of the Flock of God, should act as *Moses* did, should live *as seeing him that is invisible*, Heb. xi. 27. :

III. Take heed to your personal Religion, *as to the Growth and Increase of it.* Let it be ever upon the advancing Hand. Be tenderly sensible of every wandering Affection toward Vanity, every Deviation from God and your Duty, every rising Sin, every De-

8 *Of a Minister's personal Religion.*

gree of growing Distance from God. Watch and pray much, and converse much with God, as one of his ministring Angels in Flesh and Blood, and grow daily in Conformity to God and your blessed Saviour, who is the first Minister of his Father's Kingdom, and the fairest Image of his Father.

Such a Conduct will have several happy Influences towards the fulfilling of your Ministry, and will render you more fit for every part of your public Ministrations.

1. Hereby you will improve in your Acquaintance with divine Things, and the spiritual Parts of Religion, that you may better teach the People both Truth and Duty. Those who are much with God may expect and hope that he will *teach them the Secrets of his Covenant*, and the Ways of his Mercy, by Communications of divine Light to their Spirits. *The Secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will shew them his Covenant*, Psalm xxv. 14. Luther used to say, that he got more Knowledge in a short Time by Prayer sometimes, than by the Study and Labour of many Hours.

2. Hereby you will be more fit to speak to the great God at all Times, as a Son with holy Confidence in him as your Father, and you will be better prepared to pray with and for the People. You will have an habitual Readiness for the Work, and Increase in the Gift

Of a Minister's personal Religion. 9

Gift of Prayer. You will obtain a Treasure and Fluency of sacred Language, suited to address God on all Occasions.

Hereby you will gain a Freedom and Interest in the Throne of Grace, and become a more powerful Intercessor for your People, under the Influence of *Jesus* the great Intercessor, who is ever near the Throne; and before you improve your Interest in Heaven, for the Edification of those who are committed to your Care.

3. Hereby you will be kept near to the Spring of all Grace, to the Fountain of Strength and Comfort in your Work: You will be ever deriving fresh Anointings, fresh Influences, daily Lights and Powers, to enable you to go thro' all the Difficulties and Labours of your sacred Office.

4. Hereby, when you come among Men in your sacred Ministrations, you will appear, and speak, and act like a Man come from God; like *Moses* with a Lustre upon his Face, when he had conversed with God; like a Minister of the Court of Heaven employed in a Divine Office; like a Messenger of Grace who hath just been with God, and received Instructions from him; and the World will *take Cognizance of you*, as they did of the Apostles, *that they were Men who had been with Jesus*, Acts iv. 13.

5. This will better furnish you for serious Converse with the Souls and Consciences of

10 *Of a Minister's personal Religion.*

Men, by giving you experimental Acquaintance with the Things of Religion, as they are transacted in the Heart. You will learn more of the Springs of Sin and Holiness, the Workings of Nature and Grace, the Deceitfulness of Sin, the Subtilty of Temptation, and the holy Skill of counter-working the Snares of Sin, and the Devices of *Satan*, and all their Designs to ruin the Souls of Men. You will speak with more divine Compassion to wretched and perishing Mortals; with more Life and Power to stupid Sinners; with more Sweetness and Comfort to awaken'd Consciences, and with more awful Language and Influence to backsliding Christians.

You will hereby learn to preach more powerfully in all Respects for the Salvation of Men, and talk more feelingly on every sacred Subject, when the Power and Sense and Life of Godliness are kept up in your own Spirit. Then on some special Occasions it may not be improper to borrow the Language of *David* the Prophet, and of *St. Paul* and *St. John*, two great Apostles, tho' it may be best in Publick to speak in the plural Number, *We have believed, therefore we have spoken; what we have heard and learnt from Christ, we have declared unto you; what we have seen and felt, we are bold to speak; attend and we will tell you what God has done for our Souls.* You may then

Of a Minister's private Studies. 11

then at proper Seasons convince, direct and comfort others by the same Words of Light and Power, of Precept and Promise, of Joy and Hope, which have convinced, directed and comforted you : A Word coming from the Heart will sooner reach the Heart.

SECTION II.

Of a Minister's private Studies.

THE *Second* general Head of Exhortation relates to *your own private Studies* : Take heed to these, that you may better fulfil your *Ministry*. Give yourself (saith St. Paul to Timothy) to *Reading, to Meditation, that your profiting may appear to all*, 1 Tim. iv. 13, 15.

These private Studies are of various Kinds, whether you consider them *in general*, as necessary to furnish the Mind with Knowledge for the Office of the Ministry ; or *in particular*, as necessary to prepare Discourses for the Pulpit.

1st, Those *general Studies* may be just mentioned in this Place, *which furnish the Mind with Knowledge for the Work of a Minister* ; for tho' it is known you have pass'd thro' the several Stages of Science in your younger Years, and have made a good Improvement in them, yet a Review of many

12 *Of a Minister's private Studies.*

of them will be found needful, and an Increase in some (so far as Leisure permits) may be proper and useful, even thro' the whole Course of Life.

Among these some are necessary to improve the reasoning Faculty, to teach us to distinguish Truth from Falshood, and to judge aright concerning any Subjects that are proposed to us ; such as are the Art of *Logick*, which gives us Rules for judging and reasoning, and some of the speculative Principles of the *Mathematicks*, particularly the Demonstrations of *Geometry*, and the Inferences or *Corollaries* that are drawn from them, wherein we have the clearest and fairest Examples to teach us Reasoning by the Practice of it.

And as all Arts and Sciences have a Connexion with and Influence upon each other, so for a *Divine* as well as for a *Physician*, it is needful there should be some *Knowledge of Nature and the Powers of it* in the *Heavens* and *Earth*, in the *Air* and *Water*, that we may thereby learn and teach more of the Glories of our Creator, and more easily distinguish between what is natural and what is miraculous. This will enable us also to think and speak more justly almost upon any Subject which occurs in our private Reading, in our publick Ministry, or in our daily Conversation ; and particularly it is useful, if not necessary for a Minister

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to have some Acquaintance with *human Nature*, in the two constituent Parts of it *Soul* and *Body*, and in the Powers and Passions of Mankind, that we may better distinguish how far particular Actions are natural and mechanical, and how far they are voluntary and moral, virtuous or sinful; how far they are influenced by *Flesh* and *Blood*, and how far they are under the Government of the Will, which is of great Importance in order to judge right in many Cases of Conscience, and to give Directions for the moral or religious Life.

It is needful also, and of considerable Moment, that a Divine should be acquainted with the Arts of *Method* and of *Oratory*, the one to range our Thoughts and Discourses in due Order, and to set the Things of God before Men in the plainest, the most conspicuous and convincing Light; and the other to win upon the Hearts of the Hearers, and to lead them by a sweet and powerful Influence on their Affections, into the Love and Practice of Religion.

There are other parts of *Science* which are necessary for Ministers to be well acquainted with, and particularly those which are the Foundations of all Religion, such as the *Knowledge of God and his Attributes by the Light of Nature of Reason*, the *Knowledge of Man as a Creature of God, in his natural Dependance upon his Creator, and in his*

14 *Of a Minister's private Studies.*

his moral Relations both to God and his Fellow-Creatures, together with the Obligations to Duty which are derived thence, and which branch themselves into all the Parts of Morality and Religion.

'Tis requisite to have some Acquaintance also with the *Heathen* Writers, the Folly and Madness of *Pagan* Idolatry, the History and the Customs of ancient Ages and Nations, and the History of the Church of the *Jews* and of *Christians*, in order to establish our Faith in the Doctrines of Christianity, and to prove the Religion of *Christ* to be Divine, and that the Bible is the Word of God.

When this great Point is once settled, then our chief Business will be to understand this Bible, and to find out the Meaning of the Holy Scriptures ; and for this End (as well as for the reading of ancient *Heathen* Authors) 'tis requisite that we should have some Skill in the *Tongues* : and particularly those wherein the Scriptures were written, *viz.* *Hebrew*, and *Greek*, that we may be able at least to judge a little for ourselves, concerning the Translation of any Text in our Language.

For this Purpose also some Knowledge of the Customs of the Ancients, both *Jews* and *Pagans*, is necessary, in order to give us a juster Idea of many Things recorded in Scripture ; and we should get some Acquaintance

quaintance with *Geography* and *Chronology*, which will be of great service to set before our Eyes the distant Places and Times wherein those ancient Affairs were transacted, which the Scripture relates, and without which the History of Scripture, as well as some of the Prophecies, can never be well understood.

Nor is it an unprofitable Study to read some of the Writings of the *Fathers*, who lived in the very first Ages of Christianity, that we may know the Sentiments and Customs of those who lived nearest to the Days of the Apostles; this may give a little Light to some Expressions and Phrases used in Scripture, and enable us sometimes better to understand what the Evangelists and Apostles wrote. But it must be confess'd, that immediately after the Apostolic Age, and indeed before the Apostles were dead, there were so many Corruptions and Mistakes both in Faith and Worship, so many Fancies and Inventions of Men crept into the Church, that there is scarce one ancient Writer perfectly free, and not one of them to be entirely trusted as a Director of our Consciences, or as a Regulator of our Belief or Practice. St. *Paul* himself tells us, that in his Days *the Mystery of Iniquity began to work*, 2 *Thef.* ii. 7. The *Fathers*, as they are called, have many weak and fanciful Things in their Writings; 'tis the
Bible

16 *Of a Minister's private Studies.*

Bible alone that must be our Guide ; *the Word of the Lord is pure and perfect.*

Above all Things therefore the constant Reading and Study of the holy *Scriptures* are necessary, in order to a larger and more compleat Acquaintance with our divine Religion. Here our Faith and Conscience may rest safely, in all our Enquiries about Matters of Belief or Practice. The Doctrines, the Commands, the Types and Histories, the Prophecies, the Promises and Threatnings of the Word of God, are the brightest and noblest Part of the Knowledge of a Minister. These are the Things *that are able to make us and our Hearers wise to Salvation, and to furnish the Man of God for every good Word and Work,* 2 Tim. iii. 15, 16, 17. Let us never imagine we know enough of Divine Things, while we dwell in Flesh and Blood. *God and Christ*, and the Things of Heaven, are fruitful and inexhaustible Subjects of our Enquiry and Knowledge ; they are so in this World, and they will be so for ever in the World to come. The *Angels* of God *pry* further into *them*, nor shall the Sons of Men ever know them to perfection. These will be the glorious Objects of everlasting Study, and everlasting Entertainment.

I might add in the last Place, that there are some other Parts of human Knowledge, which, tho' they are not necessary, yet are greatly

greatly ornamental to a Minister in the present Age, which is so much enrich'd with Knowledge, viz. Some further Acquaintance with *modern Geography*, the Nations and Kingdoms of this World : Some general View of *Astronomy*, the Appearances, and seeming or real Motions of the Sun and Moon, Stars and Planets, and of this Earth, which is now generally agreed to be one of the planetary Worlds : To which we may join some Skill in *Philology*, *Criticism* on the Writings of Men as well as on *Scripture*, and various Parts of Science which go under the Name of the *Belles Lettres*, or *polite Learning*. These are such sort of Accomplishments of the Mind as will embellish the Character of a Minister, and render his Person and his Labours more acceptable to the World.

But amongst all these Enquiries and Studies, and these various Improvements of the Mind, let us take heed that none of them carry our Thoughts away too far from our chief and glorious Design, that is, the *Ministry of the Gospel of Christ*. Let none of them intrench upon those Hours which should be devoted to our Study of the Bible, or Preparations for the Pulpit : And wheresoever we find our Inclination too much attach'd to any particular human Science, let us set a Guard upon ourselves, lest it rob us of our diviner Studies, and our best

18 *Of a Minister's private Studies.*

best Improvement. A Minister should remember, that himself, with all his Studies, is consecrated to the Service of the Sanctuary : Let every Thing be done therefore with a View to our great End : Let all the rest of our Knowledges be like Lines drawn from the vast Circumference of universal Nature, pointing to that divine Centre, God and Religion : and let us pursue every Part of Science with a Design to gain better Qualifications thereby for our sacred Work.

Forgive me, my Friends, that I have dwelt so long on these *general Preparations for the Work of the Ministry*. Tho' they are learnt at the Academy, yet I can by no means think it proper they should be left there and forgotten.

2dly, I come to speak of those *particular Studies which are preparative for the publick Work of the Pulpit* ; and here when you retire to compose a Sermon, let your great End be ever kept in View, *i. e.* to say something for the Honour of God, for the Glory of Christ, for the Salvation of the Souls of Men ; and for this Purpose a few Rules may perhaps be of some Service.

One great and *general Rule* is, *Ask Advice of Heaven by Prayer about every Part of your preparative Studies* ; seek the Direction and Assistance of the Spirit of God, for inclining your Thoughts to proper Subjects, for guiding you to proper Scriptures, and framing

framing your whole Sermon both as to the Matter and Manner, that it may attain the divine and sacred Ends proposed. But I insist not largely on this here, because *Prayers* for Aids and Counsels from Heaven belongs to every Part of your Work, both in the Closet, in the Pulpit, and in your daily Conversation.

The *particular* Rules for your preparatory Work may be such as these.

I. In choosing your Texts or Themes of Discourse, seek such as are most suited to do good to Souls, according to the present Wants, Dangers, and Circumstances of the People; whether for the Instruction of the Ignorant; for the Conviction of the Stupid and Senseless; for the melting and softening of the Obstinate; for the Conversion of the Wicked; for the Edification of Converts; for the Comfort of the Timorous and Mournful; for gentle Admonition of Backsliders, or more severe Reproof. Some Acquaintance with the general Case and Character of your Hearers is needful for this End.

II. In handling the Text, divide, explain, illustrate, prove, convince, infer, and apply in such a Manner, as to do real Service to Men, and Honour to our Lord *Jesus Christ*. Do not say within yourself, *How much or how elegantly I can talk upon such a Text*, but *What can I say most usefully to those*

20 *Of the Composure of Sermons.*

those who bear me, for the Instruction of their Minds, for the Conviction of their Consciences, and for the Persuasion of their Hearts? Be not fond of displaying your learned Criticisms in clearing up the Terms and Phrases of a Text, where Scholars only can be edified by them; nor spend away the precious Moments of the Congregation, in making them hear you explain what is clear enough before, and hath no need of explaining; nor in proving that which is so obvious that it wants no proof. This is little better than trifling with God and Man.

Think not How can I make a Sermon soonest and easiest? but how I can make the most profitable Sermon for my Hearers: Not what fine Things I can say, either in a way of Criticism or Philosophy, or in a way of Oratory and Harangue, but what powerful Words I can speak to impress the Consciences of them that hear with a serious and lasting Sense of moral, divine, and eternal Things. Judge wisely what to leave out as well as what to speak. Let not your chief Design be to work up a Sheet, or to hold out an Hour, but to save a Soul.

III. In speaking of the great Things of God and Religion, remember you are a Minister of *Christ* and the Gospel, sent to publish to Men what God has reveal'd by his Prophets and Apostles, and by his Son *Jesus*; and not a *Heathen Philosopher* to teach
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the People merely what the Light of Reason can search out : You are not to stand up here as a Professor of *Ancient or Modern Philosophy*, nor an Usher in the School of *Plato or Seneca*, or Mr. *Locke* ; but as a Teacher in the School of *Christ*, as a Preacher of the New Testament. You are not a *Jewish Priest* to instruct Men in the precise Niceties of ancient *Judaisms*, legal Rites and Ceremonies ; but you are a *Christian Minister* ; let *Christianity* therefore run thro' all your Composures, and spread its Glories over them all.

It is granted indeed, that Reasonings from the Light of Nature have a considerable Use in the Ministry of the Gospel. 'Tis by the Principles of *natural Religion*, and by Reasoning from them on the wonderful Events of Prophecy and Miracle, &c. that we ourselves must learn the Truth of the *Christian Religion*, and we must teach the People to build their Faith of the Gospel on just and rational Grounds ; and this may perhaps, at some Time or other, require a few whole Discourses on some of the principal Themes of natural Religion, in order to introduce and display the Religion of *Jesus*. But such Occasions will but seldom arise in the Course of your Ministry.

It is granted also, that it is a very useful Labour sometimes in a Sermon to shew how far the Light of Nature and Reason will
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22 *Of the Composition of Sermons.*

carry us on in the Search of Duty and Happiness; and then to manifest how happily the Light of Scripture supplies the Deficiencies of it; that the People may know how greatly they are indebted to the peculiar Favour and Goodness of God for the Book of Divine Revelation.

And yet farther, since the Whole of natural Religion is contained and included in the Gospel of *Christ*, it is proper sometimes to shew that Reason as well as Scripture confirms the same Doctrines, and obliges us to practise the same Duties. 'Tis certain also that human Reason, tho' it could not discover the Religion of *Christ*, yet it is able to point out many admirable Glories and Divine Condecencies in this Religion when 'tis discover'd. It is good to impress the Conscience as well as instruct the Understanding by the two great Lights that God has given us, (*viz.*) *Reason* and *Revelation*. Two such Pillars will support the Structure of Religion better than one. And when we happen to hear any of our Brethren occasionally insisting on the Themes of natural Religion, and enforcing the Belief of Truths, or the Practice of Duties by the Principles of Reason, let us candidly suppose they are pursuing some of these Designs which I have now mention'd, and that the Principles and Topicks of Revelation and Christianity are in Reserve
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to be display'd at large in their following Sermons.

In general, 'tis most safe and honourable for a Minister of *Christ* to make the Gospel appear to be the reigning Principle in his Discourses, and make our Hearers see how gloriously it has improv'd the Religion of Nature.

If you speak of our natural Knowledge of the *Attributes of God*, and the *Truths of Religion that Reason dictates*, shew how they are all exalted, how brightly they shine in the Gospel of *Christ*, and what new Discoveries and new Glories relating to them are derived from the Holy Scriptures.

If you speak of the *Duties which Men owe to God, or to one another*, even those which are found out by Reason and natural Conscience, shew how the Gospel of *Christ* hath advanced and refined every Thing that Nature and Reason teach us : Inforce these Duties by Motives of *Christianity* as well as by philosophical Arguments drawn from the Nature of Things : Stir up the Practice of them by the Examples of *Christ* and his Apostles, by that Heaven and that Hell which are reveal'd to the World by *Jesus Christ* our Saviour : Impress them on the Heart by the constraining Influences of the Mercy of God, and the dying Love of our Lord *Jesus Christ*, by his glorious Appearance to judge the Living and the Dead, and
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24 *Of the Composure of Sermons.*

by our blessed Hope of attending him on that Day. These are the appointed Arguments of our Holy Religion, and may expect more divine Success.

When you have Occasion to represent what Need there is of Diligence and Labour in the Duties of Holiness, shew also what Aids are promised in the Gospel to humble and feeble Souls who are sensible of their own Frailty to resist Temptations, or to discharge religious and moral Duties; and what Influences of the Holy Spirit may be expected by those who seek it. Let them know that *Christ is exalted* to send forth this Spirit, *to bestow Repentance and Sanctification as well as Forgiveness, for without him we can do nothing*, Act. v. 31. John xv. 5.

As there are Seasons and Times proper to impress the Mind with the Glories of God our Creator, and to enforce the Duties of Morality, to teach Men to govern their unruly Appetites and Passions, to bind all the Rules of Virtue on the Consciences of Men, and press them with Zeal and Fervour according to the Example of the Apostles in the New Testament; so there are Times and Seasons to treat more at large on the peculiar Truths of Revelation and the Glories of *Christianity*, both for the Honour of our Saviour, and for the Welfare of Souls. For this Reason they are so largely insisted on by the holy Writers,

ters, those blessed Patterns of our Ministry. There must be some Seasons allotted to the Descriptions of the sinful and miserable State of Mankind as revealed in Scripture, to the Dignity of the Person of *Christ* the Redeemer, the only begotten Son of God and the Son of Man, to the Covenant of Grace, of Pardon and Salvation made with Men, in and thro' this glorious Mediator, to the Incarnation, Life and Death, the Sacrifice and Atonement, the Resurrection, Intercession and universal Government and Lordship of *Jesus Christ*, and his coming to judge the World at the last Day, and to the appointed Methods of our Participation of the Blessings which he bestows. These illustrious Doctrines are big with a thousand Duties both to God and Man; all the Practices of Faith and Love, Repentance and universal Holiness flow from them by plain and easy Deduction: All the sacred Rules of Piety and Virtue, Sobriety, Justice and Goodness, the holy Skill of living and dying in the Love and Favour of God, are the most natural and happy Inferences from these sublime Truths of our Religion. We preach the Gospel in a very defective Manner if we neglect the moral or divine Duties which are derived from the Faith of *Christ*.

If you would raise the Hearts of your Hearers to a just and high Esteem of this

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26 *Of the Composure of Sermons.*

Gospel of Grace, and impress them with an awful Sense of the divine Importance and Worth of it, be not afraid to lay human Nature low, and to represent it in its Ruins by the Fall of the first *Adam*. 'Tis the vain Exaltation of ruin'd Nature that makes the Gospel so much despised in our Age. Labour therefore to make them see and feel the deplorable State of Mankind as described in Scripture, that *by one Man Sin entered into the World, and Death by Sin, and a Sentence of Death hath passed upon all Men, for that all have sinned*: Let them hear and know that *Jews and Gentiles are all under Sin, that there is none righteous, no, not one*; that every Mouth may be stopped and all the World may appear guilty before God. Let them know that 'tis not in Man that walketh to direct his Steps; that we are not sufficient of our selves to think any good thing: that we are without Strength, alienated from the Life of God thro' the Ignorance and Darkness of our Understandings, and are by Nature Children of Disobedience, and Children of Wrath; that we are unable to recover our selves out of these Depths of Wretchedness without the Condescensions of Divine Grace, and that the Gospel of *Christ* is introduced as the only sovereign Remedy and Relief under all this Desolation of Nature, this overwhelming Distress; *neither is there Salvation in any other, for there is none other*
Name

Name under Heaven given among Men, whereby we must be saved, Acts iv. 12. And they that wilfully and obstinately reject this Message of divine Love, must perish without Remedy and without Hope; *for there remains no more Sacrifice for Sin, but a certain fearful Expectation of Vengeance, Heb. x. 26.*

By this Conduct you will approve yourself to be a faithful Messenger of *Christ* in good Earnest, *a Minister of the New Testament*, and *a Workman that needs not to be ashamed*, if you take special Seasons to discover to Men what the Word of God reveals concerning their Misery, and declare to them *the whole Counsel of God* for their Salvation.

I intreat you, my dear Friend and Brother, to get it deeply imprest on your Heart, that as (I believe) your real and sincere Design is to save the Souls of Men from Sin and eternal Death, so 'tis the Gospel of *Christ* which is the only Instrument whereby you can ever hope to attain this blessed End; and that for two Reasons.

(1.) 'Tis this Gospel which in its own Nature is most happily suited in all the Parts of it to this great Design, and no other Schemes which the Wit or Reason of Man can contrive are so: 'Tis the Voice of pardoning Grace and Reconciliation to God by *Jesus Christ* that powerfully allures and encourages the awakened Sinner to return

28 *Of the Composure of Sermons.*

to his Duty to God and his Maker : 'Tis the Promise of Divine Assistance to enable us to mortify Sin, and to practise Holiness, which animates the feeble Creature to attempt it : 'Tis the attractive View of heavenly Blessedness as revealed in the Gospel that invites the Soul onward to make its Way through all the dangerous Inticements and Terrors of this World which is at enmity with God. The divine Fitness of this Gospel of Grace to restore fallen Man to the Favour and Image of his Maker is so various and astonishing, that to describe it in all Instances would require a large Volume.

And (2.) As the Gospel is so happily suited to attain these Ends, so 'tis the only effectual Means that God has appointed in the Lips of his Ministers for this Purpose. 'Tis with these wondrous Discoveries of this Gospel that he furnished the Minds and Lips of the Fishermen and illiterate Persons, when he sent them forth to convert and save a perishing World. These were the sacred Weapons with which they were armed, when our exalted Saviour gave them Commission to travel thro' the Dominions of *Satan*, which were spread over the *Heathen* Countries, and to raise up a Kingdom for himself amongst them. 'Twas with Principles, Rules and Motives derived from this Gospel that they were sent to attack the

reigning Vices of Mankind, to reform profligate Nations, and to *turn them from dumb Idols to serve the living God*. And tho' St. Paul were a Man of Learning above the rest, yet he was not *sent to preach the enticing Words of Man's Wisdom*, nor to talk as the Disputers of the Age and Philosophers did in their Schools; but his Business was to *preach Christ crucified*: Tho' this Doctrine of the Cross and the Son of God hanging upon it, *was a Stumbling-block to the Jews, and the Greeks counted it Foolishness, yet to them that were called, both Jews and Greeks, this Doctrine was the Power of God and the Wisdom of God for the Salvation of Men*. And therefore St. Paul determined to know nothing among them in comparison of the Doctrine of Christ and him crucified. These were the Weapons of his Warfare which were mighty thro' God, to the pulling down of the strong Holds of Sin and Satan in the Hearts of Men, and brought every Thought into Captivity to the Obedience of Christ. 'Twas by the Ministration of this Gospel that the Fornicators were made chaste and holy, and Idolaters became Worshipers of the God of Heaven; that Thieves learnt honest Labour, and the Covetous were taught to seek Treasures in Heaven; the Drunkards grew out of love with their Cups, and renounced all Intemperance, the Revilers governed their Tongues

and spoke well of their Neighbours, and the cruel *Extortioners* and Oppressors learn'd to practise Compassion and Charity : These vilest of Sinners, these Children of Hell, were made *Heirs of the Kingdom of Heaven*, being washed, being sanctified, being justified in the Name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God, 1 Cor. vi. 9, &c.

Had you all the refined Science of *Plato* or *Socrates*, all the Skill in Morals that ever was attained by *Zeno*, *Seneca* or *Epicetetus*, were you furnished with all the flowing Oratory of *Cicero*, or the Thunder of *Demosthenes*, were all these Talents and Excellencies united in one Man, and you were the Person so richly endowed, and could you employ them all in every Sermon you preach, yet you could have no reasonable Hope to convert and save one Soul in *Great-Britain*, where the Gospel is published, while you lay aside the glorious Gospel of *Christ* and leave it entirely out of your Discourses.

Let me proceed yet further and say, Had you the fullest Acquaintance that ever Man acquired with all the Principles and Duties of natural Religion, both in its regard to God and to your Fellow-Creatures, had you the Skill and Tongue of an Angel to range all these in their fairest Order, to place them in their fullest Light, and to pronounce and represent the whole Law of God with such
Force

Force and Splendor to a *British* Auditory as was done to the *Israelites* at Mount *Sinai*, you might perhaps lay the Consciences of Men under deep Conviction, *for by the Law is the Knowledge of Sin* : But I am fully persuaded you would never reconcile one Soul to God, you would never change the Heart of one Sinner, nor bring him into the Favour of God, nor fit him for the Joys of Heaven without this blessed Gospel which is committed to your Hands.

The great and glorious God is jealous of his own Authority and of the Honour of his Son *Jesus* : Nor will he condescend to bless any other Methods for obtaining so divine an End, than what he himself has prescribed ; nor will his Holy Spirit, whose Office is to glorify *Christ*, stoop to concur with any other sort of Means for the saving of Sinners where the Name and Offices of his Son, the only appointed Saviour, are known, and despised and neglected. 'Tis the Gospel alone that is the Power of God to Salvation. *If the Prophets will not stand in his Counsel, nor cause the People to hear his Words, they will never be able to turn Israel from the Iniquity of their Ways, nor the Evil of their Doings, Jerem. xxiii. 22.*

Perhaps it may be said in opposition to this Advice, that the peculiar Doctrines and Discoveries of the Gospel of *Christ* were necessary to be published in a more large

and particular Manner at the first Institution of our Religion, and to be insisted upon with greater Frequency among the *Jews*, and especially among the *Gentiles*, who before were unacquainted with the Name, the History and the several Offices of the blessed *Jesus*: But there is no such need of repeating them in *Christian* Countries, where People are trained up from their Infancy to know *Jesus Christ* the Son of God, the Saviour of the World: And therefore 'tis more needful in our Land to preach upon the natural Duties of Piety towards God, of Justice and Truth and Goodness toward our Neighbour, and Self-government and Sobriety with regard to ourselves. And this may be done with good Success among the People upon the plain Principles and Motives which arise from the very Nature of Things, from the Beauty and Excellency of Virtue and its Tendency to make all Men happy, and the natural Deformity of Vice, and the Mischiefs that attend it.

But give me leave to answer this Objection with these three or four Inquiries.

First, Was it not the special Design of these Doctrines of *Christ*, when they were first graciously communicated to the World, to reform the Vices of Mankind which Reason could not reform, and to restore the World to Piety and Virtue, for which the Powers of Reason appeared so feeble and impotent?

impotent ? The Nations of the Earth had made long and fruitless Essays what the Light of Nature and Philosophy would do to bring wandering degenerate Man back again to his Maker : Fruitless and long Essays indeed, when after some Thousands of Years the World, who had forgotten their Maker and his Laws, still run further from God, and plunged themselves into all abominable Impieties and corrupt Practices ! Now if the all-wise God saw the Gospel of *Christ* to be so fit and happy an Instrument for the Recovery of wretched Man to Religion and Morality, if he furnished his Apostles with these Doctrines for this very Purpose, and pronounced a Blessing upon them as his own Appointment, why should we not suppose that this Gospel is still as fit in its own Nature for the same Purposes as it was at first ? And why may we not hope the same heavenly Blessing in a great measure to remain upon it, for these Purposes, to the End of the World ?

While we introduce these divine Topicks, drawn from the Gospel of *Christ*, to inforce Piety and Virtue upon the Consciences of Men, God forbid that we should abandon those Arguments drawn from the Nature of Things, and from human Reason : The Gospel does by no means exclude them, but clears and enlightens and advances them all, and gives them ten-fold Power for the

34 *Of the Composition of Sermons.*

Purposes for which they are designed. The blessed Apostles themselves sometimes made use of them ; and they may be spread abroad in a rich Variety by every Preacher of the Gospel to much better Purpose than a *Seneca* or an *Epiætetus* could display them. All kind of Efforts are necessary, and every sort of Weapon may be used in its proper place to make Assaults upon the Kingdom of *Satan* in the Hearts of Men ; but 'tis evident that the divine Principles and Motives of *Christianity* were sent us down from Heaven as more sovereign Remedies for the mortal Diseases of the Soul, and far more effectual for the Reformation of Mankind.

Secondly, If the beautiful Ideas of Virtue and Religion, and the natural Tendency of it to make Men happy, be such sufficient Motives to inforce the Practice of it, I would enquire why was not the *Gentile* World reformed without the Gospel ? Why were the polite and knowing Nations so abominably and almost universally sunk into shameful Vices ? Why did not the self-sufficient Reward of Virtue constrain greater Numbers of Mankind to change their Manners, and to practise good Morality ? If this had been the best and most effectual Way of changing the Hearts and of reforming the profligate Lives of Men, why was not *St. Paul* sent only or chiefly with these

these Principles and Instructions of Reason, to talk of the divine Beauty of Religion and Excellency of Virtue amongst them, and the Advantages that it brought into human Society and private Life? What need was there that he should be commissioned to preach the Doctrine of the Cross of *Christ*, and the Love of the Son of God descending from Heaven to die for Sinners? What makes him dwell so much upon the Recovery of a sinful World to God by the Atonement and Sufferings of the blessed *Jesus*, as a Means and Motive to persuade Sinners to forsake their Sins, and be reconciled to God? Why are the Evangelic Topics so often insisted on and represented in lively Language for the Encouragement of Virtue and Piety, and as a Guard against Sin? What need had he of the History of a crucified Son of God rising from the Dead, ascending to Heaven, sitting at the right Hand of God, interceding for Sinners, and governing the World, in order to reform Mankind from Vice and Impiety? Why does the Scripture tell us, that the *Hearts of Men* are to be purified by Faith, that believing in the Son of God is the Way to get the victory over the World? What need was there that *St. Paul* should teach us, that our Sins are to be mortified in us by the Assistance of the Holy Spirit, or that *St. Peter* or *St. John* should tell us, that we must be

36 *Of the Composition of Sermons.*

born again and made new Creatures by the *Word of God*, and by *this blessed Spirit* and his Influences? Were all these Doctrines so needful in the primitive Days, and attended with such illustrious and divine Success, and are they grown useless and needless now?

Let me inquire, in the *Third* place, Are all the Hearers that make up our publick Assemblies so well acquainted with the Doctrines of *Christ* and the Gospel in our Day, that they have no need to be taught them? Have they all enjoyed so happy an Education from their Infancy, as to understand the Principles of the *Christian* Religion, and the peculiar Articles of the Faith, which are so necessary to restore Sinners to a divine Life? Do they so much as know that they are by Nature dead in *Trespases* and *Sins*? And do they know how to apply those vital Truths to the blessed Purposes of Godliness? I am sure when we make particular Inquiries, we find many of them ignorant enough both of themselves and their Saviour, and they have need to be taught the *first Principles of the Oracles of God*, and the Faith of *Jesus*.

Shall I inquire yet further, Is this a Day when we should leave the peculiar Articles of the Religion of *Christ* out of our Ministrations, when the Truth of them is boldly called in question, and denied by such Multitudes

titudes who dwell amongst us? Is this a proper Time for us to forget the Name of *Chrift* in our publick Labours, when the witty Talents and Reasonings of Men join together and labour hard to caſt out his ſacred Name with Contempt and Scorn? Is it ſo ſeaſonable a Practice in this Age to neglect theſe evangelick Themes, and to preach up Virtue without the ſpecial Principles and Motives with which *Chrift* has furniſhed us, when there are ſuch Numbers amongst us who are fond of *Heatheniſm*, who are endeavouring to introduce it again into a *Chriſtian* Country, and to ſpread the Poiſon of Infidelity thro' a Nation called by his Name? If this be our Practice, our Hearers will begin to think indeed, that *Infidels* may have ſome Reason on their ſide, and that the glorious Doctrines of the Goſpel of *Chrift* are not ſo neceſſary as our Fathers thought them, while they find no Mention of them in the Pulpit, no Uſe made of them in our Diſcourſes from Week to Week, and from Month to Month, and yet we profeſs to preach for the Salvation of Souls. Will this be our Glory to imitate the Heathen Philoſophers, and to drop the Goſpel of the Son of God? To be complimented by Unbelievers as Men of ſuperior Senſe and as deep Reasoners, while we abandon the Faith of *Jeſus*, and ſtarve the Souls of our Hearers by neglecting to diſtribute

38 *Of the Composure of Sermons.*

tribute to them *this Bread of Life which came down from Heaven?* O let us who are his Ministers remember the last Words of our departing Lord, *Go, preach the Gospel to every Nation: He that believes and is baptized shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned; and Lo, I am with you alway, to the End of the World.* Let us fulfil the Command, let us publish the Threatning with the Promise, and let us wait for the attendant Blessing.

Wheresoever this Gospel is published with clear and proper Evidence, the Belief of it is made necessary to Salvation, and 'tis part of the Commission of Ministers to make known this to the People: Nor is there any thing else which can stand in the Room and Stead of this Gospel, or attain those happy Purposes for which this holy Institution was designed. Unless therefore you have such an high Esteem for the Gospel of *Christ*, and such a Sense of its divine Worth and Power, as to take it along with you when you desire to save Souls, you had better lay down the Ministry and abandon your sacred Profession; for you will but spend your Strength for naught, and waste your Breath in vain Declamations: You will neither *save your own Soul*, nor *them that hear you*; and you will have a terrible Account to give at the last Day, what you have done with this Gospel which was intrusted

trusted with you for the Salvation of Men : You have hid this divine Talent in the Earth, you have traded intirely with your own Stock, you have *compassed yourself about with Sparks of Light of your own kindling, and you must lie down in Sorrow* with eternal Loss.

Forgive me, my dear Brother and Friend, and you, my beloved and honoured Brethren in the Ministry, forgive me, if I have indulged too much Vehemence in this Part of my Discourse, if I have given too great a Loose to Pathetic Language on this needful Subject. I doubt not but your own Consciences bear me witness that this elevated Voice, is not the Voice of Reproof, but of friendly Warning ; and, I persuade myself, that you all join with me in this Sentiment, that if ever we are so happy as to reform the Lives of our Hearers, to convert their Hearts to God, and to train them up for Heaven, it must be done by the Principles of the Gospel of *Christ*. On the Occasion of such an Head of Advice, therefore, I assure my self you will forgive these warm Emotions of Spirit. Can there be any juster Cause or Season to exert Fervour and Zeal, than while we are pleading for the Name and Honour, and Kingdom of our adored *Jesus* ? Let him live, let him reign for ever exalted on his Throne of Glory ; let him live upon our Lips, and
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reign in all our Ministrations : let him live in the Hearts of all our Hearers ; let him live and reign thro' *Great-Britain* and thro' all the Nations, till Iniquity be subdued, till the Kingdom of *Satan* be destroyed, and the whole World are become willing Subjects to the Scepter of his Grace !

Thus I have finished my third Exhortation relating to the Preparation of your Sermons for the Pulpit.

IV. In addressing your Discourse to your Hearers, remember to distinguish the different Characters of *Saints* and *Sinners*, the converted and the unconverted, the sincere Christian and the formal Professor, the stupid and the awakened, the diligent and backsliding, the fearful or humble Soul, and the obstinate and presumptuous : And in various Seasons introduce a Word for each of them. *Thus you will divide the Word of God aright, and give every one their portion,* 2 Tim. ii. 15.

The general way of speaking to all Persons in one View and under one Character, as tho' all your Hearers were certainly *true Christians* and converted already, and wanted only a little further Reformation of Heart and Life, is too common in the World, but I think 'tis a dangerous way of Preaching : It hath a powerful and unhappy Tendency to lull unregenerate Sinners asleep in Security, to flatter and deceive them

them with Dreams of Happiness, and make their Consciences easy without a real Conversion of Heart to God.

Let your Hearers know that there is a vast and unspeakable Difference betwixt a Saint and a Sinner, one in *Christ* and one out of *Christ*, between one whose Heart is in the State of corrupt Nature or unrenowned, and one that is in a State of Grace and renewed to Faith and Holiness, between one who is only *born of the Flesh* and is a *Child of Wrath*, and one who is *born again*, or *born of the Spirit* and is become a *Child of God*, a *Member of Christ*, and an *Heir of Heaven*. Let them know that this Distinction is great and necessary; and 'tis not made (as some have imagined) by the Water of Baptism, but by the Operations of the Word and Spirit of God on the Hearts of Men, and by their diligent Attendance on all the appointed Means and Methods of converting Grace. 'Tis a most real Change and of infinite importance, and however it has been derided by Men, 'tis glorious in the eyes of God, and it will be made to appear so at the last Day in the eyes of Men and Angels: But it will bring with it infinite Terror to those who thought themselves safe in a common careless Profession of Christianity, without any inward and divine Change of Heart. That little Treatise written by the learned Mr. *John Jennings* concerning the
Preaching

Preaching of Christ and experimental Preaching, has many valuable Hints relating to these two last Particulars of my Exhortation.

V. Lead your Hearers wisely into the Knowledge of the Truth, and teach them to build their Faith upon solid Grounds. Let them first know *why they are Christians*, that they may be firmly established in the Belief and Profession of the Religion of *Christ*, that they may be guarded against all the Assaults of Temptation and Infidelity in this evil Day, and may be able to *render a Reason of the Hope that is in them*: Furnish them with Arguments in opposition to the rude Cavils and Blasphemies which are frequently thrown out in the World against the Name and Doctrines of the holy *Jesus*.

Then let the great, the most important and most necessary Articles of our Religion be set before your Hearers in their fairest Light. Convey them into the Understandings of those of meanest Capacity, by condescending sometimes to plain and familiar Methods of Speech; prove these important Doctrines and Duties to them by all proper Reasons and Arguments: But as to the introducing of Controversies into the Pulpit, be not fond of it, nor frequent in it: In your common Course of Preaching avoid Disputes, especially about Things of less Im-

Importance, without an apparent Call of Providence. Religious Controversies frequently introduced without real Necessity have an unhappy Tendency to hurt the Spirit of true Godliness both in the Hearts of Preachers and Hearers, 1 *Tim.* iv. 7.

And have a care of laying too much Stress on the peculiar Notions and Terms and Phrases of the little Sects and Parties in Christianity : Take heed that you do not make your Hearers Bigots and Uncharitable, while you endeavour to make them knowing Christians. Establish them in all the chief and most important Articles of the Gospel of *Christ*, without endeavouring to render those who differ from you odious in the sight of your Hearers. Whensoever you are constrained to declare your Disapprobation of particular Opinions, keep up and manifest your Love to the Persons of those who espouse them, and especially if they are Persons of Virtue and Piety.

VI. Do not content your self to compose a Sermon of mere Doctrinal Truths and Articles of Belief, but into every Sermon (if possible) bring something Practical. 'Tis true, Knowledge is the Foundation of Practice ; the Head must be furnished with a Degree of Knowledge or the Heart cannot be Good : But take heed that dry Speculations and mere Schemes of Orthodoxy do not take up too large a part of your
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44 *Of the Composure of Sermons.*

Composures ; and be sure to impress it frequently on your Hearers, that Holiness is the great End of all Knowledge, and of much more Value than the sublimest Speculations, nor is there any Doctrine but what requires some correspondent Practice of Piety or Virtue.

And among the practical Parts of Christianity, sometimes make it your Business to insist on those Subjects which are inward and spiritual, and which go by the Name of *Experimental Religion*. Now and then take such Themes as these, (*viz*) the first Awakenings of the Conscience of a Sinner by some special and awful Providence, by some particular Passages in the Word of God, in pious Writings, or publick Sermons, the inward Terrors of Mind and Fears of the Wrath of God which sometimes accompany such Awakenings, the Temptations which arise to divert the Mind from them, and to sooth up the Sinner in the Course of his Iniquities, the inward Conflicts of the Spirit in these Seasons, the Methods of Relief under such Temptations, the Arguments that may fix the Heart and Will for God against all the Inticements and Oppositions of the World, the Labours of the Conscience fluctuating between Hope and Fear, the rising and working of indwelling Sin in the Heart, the subtil Excuses framed by the Flesh for the Indulgence of it, the
Peace

Peace of God derived from the Gospel allaying the inward Terrors of the Soul under a Sense of Guilt, the Victories obtained over strong Corruptions and powerful Temptations by the Faith of unseen Things, by repeated Addresses to God in Prayer, by trusting in *Jesus* the great Mediator who is *made of God to us Wisdom and Righteousness, Sanctification and Redemption.*

While you are treating on these Subjects, give me leave to put you again in mind that it will sometimes have a very happy Influence on the Minds of Hearers to speak what you have learnt from *your own* Experience, tho' there is no need that you should tell them publicly *'tis your own*: You may inform them what you have borrowed from your own Observation, and from the Experience of Christians, Ancient or Modern, who have passed thro' the same Trials, who have wrestled with the same Corruptions of Nature, who have grappled with the same Difficulties, and at last have been made Conquerors over the same Temptations. *As Face answers Face in the Glass, so the Heart of one Man answers to another,* and the Workings of the different Principles of Flesh and Spirit, corrupt Nature and renewing Grace, have a great deal of Resemblance in the Hearts of different Persons who have passed thro' them. This
sort

46 *Of the Composure of Sermons.*

fort of Instruction drawn from just and solid Experience will animate and encourage the young Christian that begins to shake off the Slavery of Sin, and to set his Face toward Heaven : This will make it appear that Religion is no impracticable thing : 'Twill establish and comfort the Professors of the Gospel, and excite them with new Vigour to proceed in the way of Faith and Holiness, it will raise a stedfast Courage and Hope, and will generally obtain a most happy Effect upon the Souls of the Hearers beyond all that you can say to them from Principles of mere Reasoning and dry Speculation ; and especially where you have the concurrent Experience of any scriptural Examples.

VII. Whether you are discoursing of Doctrine or Duty, take great care that you impose nothing on your Hearers, either as a Matter of Faith or Practice, but what your Lord and Master *Christ Jesus* has imposed. These are the Limits of the Commission which *Christ* gave to the first Ministers of the Gospel, *Mat. xxviii. ult. Go, disciple all Nations, baptizing them* who are willing to become my Disciples, *and teach them to observe whatsoever I have commanded you.* He has not given leave to his Ministers, whether separate in their single Congregations, or united in Synods or Councils, the least Degree of Power to appoint one new

Article of Faith, nor to injoin any new sort of Devotion or Practice, nor to impose any one Rite or Ceremony of Worship, but what he himself has framed and enjoined. And yet, to our universal reproach, there is scarce any Party of Christians but hath been too ready to impose some Doctrines upon the Belief of their Profelytes, which *Christ* has not imposed, or to require of them some Practices or some Abstinences, about Meat or Days, or Things indifferent, which *Christ* has not required. 'Tis this assuming Power that has turned Christianity into an hundred Shapes, and every one of them in some degree unlike the glorious Gospel. 'Tis this has brought in all the Superstitions and Fooleries, the splendid Vanities, the useless Austerities and the childish Trifles of the *Greek* and *Roman* Churches; and 'tis this has too far corrupted the Purity and defaced the Beauty of most of those Churches who boast of *Reformation*, and wear the *Protestant* Name.

Now to discourage and deter us all from such Presumption: Let us remember that this imposing Spirit has generally found it necessary to support its Commands with Penalties and Persecutions. Hence proceed the Imprisonments and the Murders, the Cruelties, the Tortures, and the wild and bloody Fury that has ravaged the Nations of *Christendom*, and cast a foul and lasting
Blot

Blot and Infamy upon the Religion of the blessed *Jesus*. Blessed *Jesus*, when shall this Stain be washed out from thy Religion, and this Scandal die ? If we survey the persecuting Laws and Edicts that have been framed and executed in *Great-Britain*, or in foreign Nations, in ancient or later Times, we shall seldom find that the plain and explicate Doctrines and Duties of the Gospel have been guarded with these Terrors : But 'tis the wretched Inventions of Men, 'tis the Institution of Priests or the Appointments of Kings, (all which have been mere Additions to the Word of God) that have had the Honour, shall I say, or the Infamy to be thus guarded with bloody Severities, and with Engines of Death. 'Tis the absolute Determination of Men upon some Points which *Christ* has not plainly determined, 'tis some Forms of pretended Orthodoxy which Scripture knows nothing of, or at least which the Word of God has not made necessary to our Faith, 'tis some Ceremonies or Modes of Worship which *Christ* and his Apostles never commanded, that have generally been the shameful Occasion of Excommunications, and Prisons, of Banishments and Martyrdoms. See to it therefore with a holy and religious Care, when you dictate any thing to your Hearers as necessary to be believed or practised, that you have the plain and evident

dent Direction of Scripture to support you in it.

'Tis this corrupt Mixture of human Opinions and human Forms of divine Service that has so disguised the pure Religion of the Gospel, as to tempt the Deist to renounce it intirely. The pure Religion of *Jesus* has divine Charms in it, and is, like the Author, *altogether lovely*: But when on one hand 'tis corrupted and debased by new Doctrines foisted into our Creeds, and new Mysteries which Men have invented to over-load our Faith; when 'tis encumbered by new Rituals of Worship, or imposed Rules and Practices on the other hand, which the holy Scripture has not enjoined, when Men make Articles of Faith which are no where plainly revealed, when they pronounce that to be a Sin which God hath no where forbidden, and appoint that to be a Duty which God hath never commanded, (which I take to be the very Nature of Superstition) it casts such a Veil of Deformity over the Beauties of the Gospel, that 'tis no wonder if the Men of Reason start at it and pronounce against it. While we hold forth this confused Mass and Mixture of Things Divine and Human, and call it the *Religion of Christ*, we tempt the Men of Infidelity to establish themselves in their Unbelief; and they will hardly now give a favourable hearing to the pure Doctrine of

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the Gospel, because they have been so much disgusted with the Sight of it in a corrupt and superstitious Dress.

But in this State of Frailty and Imperfection, Dangers attend us on either hand. As we must take heed that we do not add the Fancies of Men to our divine Religion, so we should take equal Care that we do not curtail the Appointments of *Christ*. With a sacred Vigilance and Zeal we should maintain all the plain, express, and necessary Articles that we find evidently written in the Word of God, and suffer none of them to be lost thro' our Default. The World has been so long imposed upon by these shameful Additions of Men to the Gospel of *Christ*, that they seem now to be resolved to bear them no longer. But they are unhappily running into another Extreme: Because several Sects and Parties of Christians have tacked on so many false and unbecoming Ornaments to Christianity, they resolve to deliver her from these Disguises; but while they are paring off all this foreign Trumpery, they too often cut her to the quick, and sometimes let out her Life-Blood, (if I may so express it) and maim her of her very Limbs and vital Parts. Because so many irrational Notions and Follies have been mixed up with the Christian Scheme, 'tis now a modish Humour of the Age to renounce almost every thing that Reason

Reason doth not discover, and to reduce Christianity itself to little more than the Light of Nature and the Dictates of Reason. And under this sort of Influence there are some who are Believers of the Bible and the Divine Mission of *Christ*, and dare not renounce the Gospel itself, yet they interpret some of the peculiar and express Doctrines and Duties of it into so poor, so narrow, and so jejune a Meaning, that they suffer but little to remain beyond the Articles of natural Religion. This leads some of the learned and polite Men of the Age to explain away the Sacrifice and the Atonement made for our Sins by the Death of *Christ*, and to bereave our Religion of the ordinary Aids of the Holy Spirit, both which are so plainly and expressly revealed, and so frequently repeated in the New Testament, and which are two of the chief Glories of the blessed Gospel, and which perhaps are two of the chief Uses of those sacred Names of the *Son* and the *Holy Spirit* into which we are baptized. 'Tis this very Humour that persuades some Persons to reduce the Injury and Mischief that we have sustained by the Sin and Fall of *Adam* to so slight a Bruise and so inconsiderable a Wound, that a small Matter of Grace is needful for our Recovery; and accordingly they impoverish the rich and admirable Remedy of the Gospel to a very culpable Degree, suppo-

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sing no more to be necessary for the Restoration of Man, than those few Ingredients which in their Opinion make up the whole Composition. Hence it comes to pass that the Doctrine of Regeneration, or an entire Change of corrupt Nature by a Principle of Divine Grace, is almost lost out of their Christianity, or at least they suppose renewing Grace and Sanctification by the Holy Spirit and his Assistances to carry nothing more in them than the outward Divine Messages and Discoveries of Grace made and attested by the extraordinary Gifts of the Spirit to the Christian World. This is a dangerous Extreme on the other hand; I hope it will never obtain amongst us Protestant Dissenters: But since 'tis a fashionable Error, you ought to set a stricter Guard against it. As he that *adds or takes away from the Words of the Prophecy* in the latter End of the Book of God is left under a Curse, *Rev. xxii.* so we should set a holy Guard upon ourselves, lest we add any things to the Gospel of *Christ*; or take any thing from it, lest we expose ourselves to the same Divine Indignation.

To avoid both these Extremes, permit me to give this general Word of Advice, and may God enable me to take it myself, (*viz.*) That in all our Ministrations we keep a constant and religious Eye upon the holy Scripture, that in the necessary and most important

important Points of Doctrine or Duty, we may teach our Hearers neither more nor less than the Scripture teaches. Our great Business is to expound Scripture, and enforce the Word of God upon the Minds and Hearts of Men: When therefore we explain the great and necessary Points of the Gospel contained in any one Scripture, let us do it as much as possible by bringing other Parts of Scripture into the same View, that the Word of God may be a Comment on itself. When we have Occasion to make Inferences from it, let us take care that the Connection of them be strong and evident, and that they lie not far off at a distance, for in very distant Inferences we are more liable to Mistake. When we are delivering our own best Opinions concerning divine Subjects, and giving our Advice upon Matters which are not so evidently and so expressly revealed, let us practise the Modesty of the blessed Apostle, 1 Cor. vii. 6, 10, 12, 25, &c. *I speak this by Permission or Advice, and not of Commandment:*
* *'Tis I speak it, and not the Lord: I have*

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* I know these Expressions of the Apostle have another Turn given them by some judicious Commentators, (*viz.*) that the Apostle had sufficient Proof of the Directions which he pronounces strongly, to be the *Commands of Christ* from other Places of Scripture; but that these which he expresses so cautiously were Directions which *Christ* had not elsewhere given us, but were made known

54 *Of the Composure of Sermons.*

no plain Commandment of the Lord about it, yet I give my Judgment as one that has obtained Mercy of the Lord to be Faithful: I suppose therefore that in the present Case this is good to be practised, or that to be avoided: Judge ye within your selves whether what I speak be agreeable to the Word of God, 1 Cor. xi. 13.

VIII. Remember that you have to do with the *Understanding, Reason and Memory* of Man, with the *Heart and Conscience*, with the *Will and Affections*; and therefore you must use every Method of Speech which may be most proper to engage and employ each of these Faculties or Powers of human Nature on the Side of Religion and in the Interests of God and the Gospel.

Your first Business is with the *Understanding*, to make even the lower Parts of your Auditory know what you mean. Endeavour therefore to find out all the clearest and most easy Forms of Speech to convey divine Truths into the Minds of Men. Seek to obtain a perspicuous Style and a clear and distinct Manner of Speaking, that you may effectually impress the Understanding while you pronounce the Words; that you may

known to him by his own special Inspiration. I am not fully assured which is the true Sense, but I rather think 'tis to be understood as *St. Paul's* own private Sense of Things, who was a Man favoured with many Inspirations.

so exactly imprint on the Mind of the Hearers the same Ideas which you yourself have conceived, that they may never mistake your Meaning. This Talent is sooner attained in younger Years by having some judicious Friend to hear or read over your Discourses, and inform you where Perspicuity is wanting in your Language, and where the Hearers may be in danger of mistaking your Sense. For want of this, some young Preachers have fixed themselves in such an obscure way of writing and talking, as hath very much prevented their Hearers from obtaining distinct Ideas of their Discourse. And if a Man gets such an unhappy Habit, he will be sometimes *talking to the Air*, and make the People stare at him as though he were *speaking some unknown Language*.

Remember you have to do with the *reasoning Powers of Man* in preaching the Gospel of *Christ*; for tho' this Gospel be revealed from Heaven, and could never be discovered by all the Efforts of human Reason, yet 'tis the Reason of Man must judge of several Things relating to it, (*viz.*) It is Reason must determine whether the Evidence of its heavenly Original be clear and strong: It is Reason must judge whether such a Doctrine or such a Duty be contained in this Gospel, or may be justly deduced from it: It is the Work of human Reason to

compare one Scripture with another, and to find out the true Sense of any particular Text by this means: And it is Reason also must give its Sentence whether a Doctrine, which is pretended to be contained in Scripture, be contrary to the eternal and unchangeable Relations and Reasons of Things; and if so, then Reason may pronounce that this Doctrine is not from God, nor can be given us by Divine Revelation. Reason therefore hath its Office and proper Province even in Matters of Revelation; yet it must always be confessed, that some Propositions may be revealed to us from Heaven, which may be so far superior to the Limits and Sphere of our reasoning Powers in this present State, that human Reason ought not to reject them, because it cannot fully understand them, nor clearly and perfectly reconcile them; unless it plainly see a natural Absurdity in them, a real Impossibility, or a plain Inconsistence with other Parts of divine Revelation.

Well then, since you have to do with reasonable Creatures in your sacred Work, let your Manner of speaking be rational, and your Arguments and Inferences just and strong, that you may effectually convince your Hearers of the Truth of what you deliver in your Ministrations of the Gospel.

And

And in your Representation of Things to the *Reason* and *Understanding* of Men, it would sometimes be of special Advantage to have some Power over the Fancy or *Imagination*: This would help us to paint our Themes in their proper Colours, whether of the alluring or the forbidding Kind. And now and then we should make use of both, in order to impress the Idea on the Soul with happier Force and Success.

When you would describe any of the personal or social Virtues of Life, so as to enforce their Practice, set yourself to display the Beauties and Excellencies of them in their own agreeable and lovely Forms and Colours. But do not content yourself with this alone: This is not sufficient to allure the degenerate and sensual Mind of Man to practise them. Few Persons are of so happy a Disposition, and so refined a Genius, as to be wrought upon by the mere Aspect of such inviting Qualities. Endeavour therefore to illustrate the Virtues by their contrary Vices, and set forth these moral Mischiefs both in their Deformities and their dangerous Consequences before the Eyes of your Hearers. Think it not enough to represent to them the shining Excellencies of Humility and Benevolence, of Justice, Veracity, Gratitude and Temperance; but produce to sight the vile Features of Pride, Envy, Malice, Spite, Knavery, Falshood, D 5 Revenge,

Revenge, Sensuality, Luxury, and the rest of that cursed Train, in their proper Places and Seasons. Make it evident, how contrary they are both to the Law of God and the Gospel of Christ; describe them in all their several Forms, Shapes and Appearances; strip them of their false Pretences and Disguises; shew how they insinuate and exert themselves in different Occurrences of Life, and different Constitutions; and pursue them so narrowly as it were by a Hue and Cry, with such exact Descriptions, that if any of these Vices are indulged by your Hearers, they may be found out by strict Self-Examination, that the Consciences of the Guilty may be laid under Conviction of Sin, and be set in the way of Repentance and Reformation.

Whensoever any Vice has found the way into our Bosoms, and made its Nest there, its proper and evil Features and Characters had need to be marked out by the Preacher with great Accuracy, that it may be discovered to our Consciences in order to its Destruction: For these wretched Hearts of ours are naturally so fond of all their own Inmates, that they are too ready to hide their ill Qualities from our own Sight and Conviction, and thus they cover and save them from the Sentence of Mortification and Death, which is denounced against every Sin in the Word of God. And let the
Preacher

Preacher and the Hearer both remember, that Sin must be pursued to the Death, or else there is no Life for the Soul. 'Tis only the Christian who *by the Spirit mortifies the sinful Deeds of the Body*, has the Promise of Salvation and *Life*, Rom. viii. 13.

It would be a happy Thing, if this vivacious and sprightly Power of the *Fancy*, which too often becomes an ingenious and successful Tempter of the Soul to Guilt, Mischief and Ruin, might, by the Art of the Preacher, be gained over to the Interests of Virtue and Goodness, and employed for God and Salvation.

Think farther, that you should take some Care also to ingage the *Memory*, and to make it serve the Purposes of Religion. Let your Reasonings be never so forcible and convincing, let your Language be never so clear and intelligible, yet if the whole Discourse glide over the Ears in a smooth and delightful Stream, and if nothing be fixed in the Memory, the Sermon is in great danger of being lost and fruitless. Now to avoid this Danger, I would recommend to you the Care of a clear and distinct Method, and let this Method appear to the Hearers by the Division of your Discourses into several plain and distinct Particulars, so that the Whole may not be a mere loose Harangue without evident Members and discernable Rests and Pauses. Whatsoever

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proper and natural Divisions belong to your Subject, mark them out by the Numbers 1st, 2d, 3d, &c. This will afford you Time to breathe in the Delivery of your Discourse, and give your Hearers a short Season for Recollection of the Particulars which have been mentioned before.

But in this Matter take care always to maintain a happy Medium, so as never to arise to such a Number of Particulars as may make your Sermon look like a Tree full of Branches in the Winter, without the beautiful and profitable Appearance of Leaves or Fruit.

Cast the Scheme of your Discourse into some distinct general Heads, and lesser Subdivisions in your first Sketches and Rudiments of it: This will greatly assist you in the Amplification, this will help you to preserve a just Method throughout, and secure you from repeating the same Thoughts too often: This will enable you to commit your Sermon to your own Memory the better, that you may deliver it with Ease, and it will greatly assist the Understanding as well as the Memory of all that hear you. It will furnish them with Matter and Method for an easy Recollection at home; for Meditation in their devout Retirement, and for religious Conference or Rehearsal after the publick Worship is ended.

Consider

Consider again, your Business is with the *Consciences* and *Wills* and *Affections* of Men. A mere Conviction of the Reason and Judgment by the strongest Arguments is hardly sufficient, in Matters of Piety and Virtue, to command the Will into Obedience, because the Appetites of the Flesh and the Interests of this World are engaged on the opposite side. 'Tis a very common Case with the Sons and Daughters of *Adam* to see and know their proper Duty, and to have the Reasons that enforce it fresh in their Memory; and yet the powerful Efforts of the Flesh and the World withhold the Will from the Practice, forbid its holy Resolutions for God and Heaven, or keep them always feeble, doubtful and wavering. The God of Nature therefore has furnished Mankind with those Powers which we call *Passions*, or *Affections of the Heart*, in order to excite the Will with superior Vigour and Activity to avoid the Evil and pursue the Good. Upon this account the Preacher must learn to address the *Passions* in a proper Manner, and I cannot but think it a very imperfect Character of a Christian Preacher, that he reasons well upon every Subject, and talks clearly upon his Text, if he has nothing of the Pathetick in his Ministrations, no Talent at all to strike the *Passions* of the Heart.

Awaken

62 *Of the Composure of Sermons.*

Awaken your Spirit therefore in your Composures, contrive all lively, forcible and penetrating Forms of Speech to make your Words powerful and impressive on the Hearts of your Hearers when Light is first let into the Mind. Practise all the awful and solemn Ways of Address to the Conscience, all the soft and tender Influences on the Heart. Try all Methods to rouse and awaken the cold, the stupid, the sleepy Race of Sinners; learn all the Language of holy Jealousy and Terror to affright the Presumptuous; all the compassionate and encouraging Manners of speaking, to comfort, encourage and direct the Awakened, the Penitent, the Willing and the Humble; all the willing and engaging Modes of Discourse and Expostulation to constrain the Hearers of every Character to attend. Seek this happy Skill of reigning and triumphing over the Hearts of an Assembly: Persuade them with Power to love and practise all the important Duties of Godliness, in opposition to the Flesh and the World; endeavour to kindle the Soul to Zeal in the holy Warfare, and to make it bravely victorious over all the Enemies of its Salvation.

But in all these Efforts of sacred Oratory, remember still you are a Minister of the Gospel of *Christ*: And as your Style must not affect the Pomp and Magnificence of the

the Theatre, so neither should you borrow your Expressions or your Metaphors from the coarsest Occupations, or any of the mean or uncleanly Occurrences in Life. Swell not the Sound of your Periods with ambitious or pedantick Phrases; dress not your serious Discourses to the People in too glittering Array, with an Affectation of gaudy and flaunting Ornaments, nor ever descend to so low a Degree of Familiarity and Meanness, as to sink your Language below the Dignity of your Subject, or your Office.

IX. As the Art of *Reasoning* and the happy Skill of *Persuasion* are both necessary to be used in framing your Discourses, so both of them may be borrowed in a good measure from the *Holy Scriptures*. The Word of God will furnish you with a rich Variety of Forms both to prove and persuade. Clear Instruction, convincing Argument, and pathetick Address to the Heart, may be all drawn from the sacred Writers. Many fine Strokes of true Logick and Rhetorick are scattered thro' that divine Book the Bible: Words of Force and Elegance to charm and allure the Soul, glitter and sparkle like Golden Ore in some peculiar Parts of it. You may find there noble Examples of the awful and compassionate Style, and inimitable Patterns of the Terrible and the Tender. Shall I therefore take the Freedom

64 *Of the Composition of Sermons.*

Freedom once again to call upon you to remember that you are a Minister of the Word of God, a Professor and Preacher of the Bible, and not a mere Philosopher upon the Foot of Reason, nor an Orator in a Heathen School?

I am not here directing you to compose your whole Sermons of nothing else but a perpetual Connexion of Texts of Scripture, nor to spend the whole Hour in running from one Text to another, as a Concordance or the Margin shall point them out. Persons of low Degrees of Learning, who give themselves up to this Method, have frequently introduced Scripture in their Discourses in a Sense which the holy Writers never thought of, and which the Spirit of God never designed: And yet if a learned Man would happily explain the more difficult Parts of the Word of God, perhaps it will be generally best done, and especially in the Pulpit, by comparing them with other Texts which are more plain and easy. Scripture is the best Interpreter of itself.

As for Argument to confirm a Doctrine or enforce a Duty, you may borrow much of this from the Word of God. It is true, when we speak of those Subjects which belong to natural Religion, we may very properly bring Arguments from the Nature of God and Man, and from the Reason of Things, to shew how necessary and reasonable

able it is to believe such a Truth, or to practise such a Virtue; nor is the Scripture itself barren of such Reasonings, and even in the peculiar Articles of Christianity it is a most excellent and useful Design now and then to shew how consistent and harmonious they are with Reason, and how worthy of our Faith and Practice, since the Word of God has revealed them, tho' they could not be found out by the Light of Nature. Yet these Arguments, if they are long and laboured, and not immediately apprehended by the Mind, are much more proper to be communicated to the World by Writing than by Speaking: There the Reader may review and dwell upon an Argument till he has grasped the whole Chain, and admits all the connected Inferences, and sees the undoubted Evidence of the Conclusion: But Reasonings in the Pulpit for the most part should be short and easy, that they may strike Conviction into the Mind almost as soon as they strike the Ear, unless your Hearers were all Men of Learning and refined Education.

But the Bulk of our Auditories, whether in the City or Country, are not much profited by Sermons merely made up of rational Proofs of any Doctrine or Duty, deeply and laboriously deduced from the original Springs and prime Nature of Things. They don't find their Minds so much enlightened.
nor

66 *Of the Composure of Sermons.*

nor their Hearts warmed by a tedious Train of connected Inferences that are fetched from distant Principles of Nature and Philosophy. This Method, I confess, may entertain a few of the more rational, the more learned, or more polite Persons in an Auditory, who can survey and comprehend the Sense of such Discourses, and feel the Force of such long Chains of Argumentation; and these Persons, I own, ought to have due Respect paid them in some Parts of our Ministry. Yet 'tis not the great Business of a Preacher of the Gospel only to please the Few, but to become all Things to all Men, and if possible, to win a Multitude of Souls to *Christ*. The Generality of our Hearers have their Lives filled up with the Business of their Station, and have little Leisure or Advantage to improve their Understandings in the Art of deep Reasoning. These will yawn and nod, and grow weary of the Sermon; nor will such a Preacher (tho' his Discourses are never so much laboured) profit the Assembly any more than please them if he goes on resolutely in this Way: Such a Minister will quickly despise his Hearers, and they will soon be tired with their Preacher; and if some Providence does not remove him to another Congregation, or if he does not betake himself to some other Business of Life, he will be tempted to for-
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take the Protestant Dissenters, and throw himself into the Established Church when he has persuaded his Conscience to comply with the imposed Terms of Ministerial Conformity.

I grant it is necessary to use good Reason thro' your whole Discourse, and connect all the Parts of it with Justice: But, as I hinted before, let your Arguments to prove any Point be generally short and easy, and within the Grasp of a common Understanding: Remember that a few plain and obvious Reasonings from familiar and well known Principles, and some clear and well chosen Texts of Scripture, with a Word or two to explain or apply them to the Understanding and Conscience of Men with Light and Zeal, will impress the Judgment and pierce the Heart with more speedy and powerful Conviction: And our Hearers, who regard a plain scriptural Argument as the *Word of the living God*, will much more readily receive it, and submit much sooner to the Force and Authority of it. *Thus saith the Prophet*, or *Thus saith the Apostle*, carries greater Weight with it, both to convince and to persuade, than a long Series of Demonstrations from remote Principles, tho' they should be firm and strong as those of *Euclid* or *Sir Isaac Newton*.

And as for bright, warm and pathetick Language, to strike the Imagination or to affect

68 *Of the Composure of Sermons.*

affect the Heart, to kindle the divine Passions or to melt the Soul, there is none of the Heathen Orators can better furnish you than the moving Expostulations of the ancient Prophets, the tender and sprightly Odes of holy *David*, or the affectionate part of the Letters of *St. Paul*, which even his Enemies in the Church of *Corinth* confess to be powerful. The *Eastern* Writers, among whom we number the *Jews*, were particularly famous for lively Oratory, for bright Images, and bold and animated Figures of Speech. Could I have heard *Isaiab* or *Jeremy* pronouncing some of their Sermons, or attended *S. Paul* in some of his pathetick Strains of Preaching, I should never mourn a Want of Acquaintance with *Tully* or *Demosthenes*.

A Preacher whose Mind is well stored and enriched with the divine Sense and Sentiments, the Reasoning and the Language of Scripture, (and especially if these are wrought into his Heart by Christian Experience) supposing his other Talents are equal to those of his Brethren, will always have a considerable Advantage over them in composing such Discourses, as shall be most popular and most useful in Christian Assemblies: And he may better expect the Presence and Blessing of God to make his Word triumph over the Souls of Men, and will generally speak to their Hearts with
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more Power for their eternal Salvation. Shew me one Sinner turned to God and Holiness by the Labours of a Christian Preacher, who is generally entertaining the Audience with a long and weighty Chain of Reasoning from the Principles of Nature, and teaching Virtue in the Language of Heathen Philosophy; and, I think I may undertake to shew you ten who have been convinced and converted, and have become holy Persons and lively Christians by an Attendance upon a scriptural, affectionate and experimental Ministry: The whole Assembly hang attentive upon the Lips of a Man who speaks to the Heart as well as the Understanding, and who can enforce his Exhortations from a manifold Experience of the Success of them. They delight to hear the Preacher, whose plain and powerful Addresses to the Conscience, and whose frequent Methods of Reasoning in the Pulpit have been drawn from what they themselves have read in Scripture concerning God and Man, Sin and Duty, our Misery and divine Mercy, Death, Resurrection, Judgment, Heaven and Hell. They attend with holy Reverence and Affection on such a Minister, whose frequent Argument both in Points of Doctrine and Practice is, *Thus saith the Lord.*

X. Be not slothful or negligent in your weekly Preparation for the Pulpit: Take
due

70 *Of the Composure of Sermons.*

due Time for it: Begin so early in the Week, that you may have Time enough before you to finish your Preparations well; and always allow for accidental Occurrences, either from Indisposition of Body, from Interruptions by Company, from unforeseen Business or Trouble, &c. that you may not be reduced to the Necessity of hurrying over your Work in haste at the End of the Week, and serving God and the Souls of Men with poor, cold and careless Performances. Remember that awful Word, tho' spoken on another Occasion, *Jer. xlviii. 10. Cursed be he that doth the Work of the Lord deceitfully.* Manage so as to leave generally the *Saturday* Evening, or at least the *Lord's-day* Morning, entire for the Review and Correction of your Discourse, and for your own spiritual Improvement by the Sermon which you have prepared for the People.

If it should happen that the mere Providence of God, without any Neglect of yours, has hindered you from making so good a Preparation as you designed, you may with Courage, and hope of divine Assistance venture into the Assembly with more slender and imperfect Furniture: But if your Conscience tells you that your Preparations are very slight, and the Neglect is all your own, you have less Reason to expect Aids from above without great Humiliation

miliation for your Negligence. And what if God should forsake you so far in the Pulpit, as to expose you to publick Shame, and thus punish you for your Carelessness in the midst of the Congregation?

Study your Matter well by Meditation and Reading, and comparing Scriptures together, till you have gotten it compleatly within your Grasp and Survey: Then if you should happen to be so situated in Preaching, that you could not refresh your Memory by the Inspection of your Paper every Minute, yet you will not be exposed to Hurry and Confusion; a ready Thought will suggest something pertinent to your Purpose. Let your Preparations be usually so perfect, that you may be able to fill up the Time allotted for the Discourse with solid Sense, and proper Language, even if your natural Spirits should happen to be heavy and indisposed at the Hour of Preaching, and if your Mind should have no new Thoughts arising in the Delivery of your Discourse. Labour carefully in the Formation of your Sermons in younger Years: A Habit of thinking and speaking well, procured by the Studies of Youth, will make the Labour of your middle Age easy, when, perhaps, you will have much less Time and Leisure.

This shall suffice for the *second general Head*, which exhorts you *to take heed to*
2 *your*

your private Studies, both those which may furnish you for the Work of the Ministry *in general*, and those which are necessary to your *particular* Preparations for the Pulpit.

S E C T I O N III.

Of Publick Ministrations.

WE proceed now to the *third* general Head, and that is, *Take heed to your publick Labours and Ministrations in the Church*; which may be done, by attending to the following Particulars.

I. Apply yourself to your Work with pious Delight; not as a Toil and Task, which you wish were done and ended, but as Matter of inward Pleasure to your own Soul: Enter the Pulpit with the Solemnity of holy Joy, that you have an Opportunity to speak for the Honour of God, and the Salvation of Men. Then you will not preach or pray with Sloth or Laziness, with Coldness or Indifference: We don't use to be slothful and indifferent in the Pursuit of our Joys, or the Relish of our chosen Pleasures. Stir up yourself to the Work with sacred Vigour, that the Assembly may feel what you speak. But if you deliver the most solemn and lively Composures like a Man that is half asleep, it will be no wonder if
your

your Hearers slumber. A dull Preacher makes a drouzy Church.

II. Endeavour to get your Heart into a Temper of divine Love, zealous for the Laws of God, affected with the Grace of *Christ*, and compassionate for the Souls of Men. With this Temper engage in publick Work. Let your Frame of Spirit *be* holy with regard to your own inward Devotion, near to God, and delighting in him : And let it be zealous for the Name of *Christ*, and the Increase of his Kingdom. O pity perishing Sinners when you are sent to invite them to be reconciled to God. Let not *Self* be the Subject or the End of your preaching, but *Christ* and the Salvation of Souls. *We preach not our selves*, saith the Apostle, *but Christ Jesus, and our selves your Servants for Jesus sake*, 2 Cor. iv. 5. Speak as a dying Preacher to dying Hearers, with the utmost Compassion to the Ignorant, the Tempted, the Foolish, and the Obstinate ; for all these are in danger of eternal Death. Attend your Work with utmost Desire to save Souls from Hell, and enlarge the Kingdom of *Christ* your Lord.

Go into the publick Assembly with a Design (if God please) to strike and persuade some Souls there into Repentance, Faith, Holiness and Salvation. Go to open blind Eyes, to unstop deaf Ears, to make

the Lame walk, to make the Foolish wise, to raise those that are dead in Trespasses and Sins to a heavenly and divine Life, and to bring guilty Rebels to return to the Love and Obedience of their Maker, by *Jesus Christ*, the great Reconciler, that they may be pardoned and saved. Go to diffuse the Savour of the Name of *Christ* and his Gospel, thro' a whole Assembly, and to allure Souls to partake of his Grace and Glory.

III. Go forth in the Strength of *Christ*, for these glorious Effects are above your own Strength, and transcend all the Powers of the brightest Preachers. *Be strong in the Grace which is in Christ Jesus*, 2 Tim. ii. 1. *Without him we can do nothing*, John xv. 5.

Go with a Design to work Wonders of Salvation on sinful Creatures, but in the Strength of *Jesus*, *who hath all Power given him in Heaven and Earth*, and hath promised to be *with his Ministers to the End of the World*, Matth. xxviii. 20. Pray earnestly for the promised Aids of the Spirit, and plead with God who hath sent you forth in the Service of the Gospel of his Son, that you may not return empty, but bring in a fair Harvest of Converts to Heaven. 'Tis the Lord of the Harvest who only can give this divine Success to the Labourers. *He that plants is nothing, and he that waters is nothing, but all our Hope is in God who giveth the Increase.*

IV. Get the Substance of the Sermon which you have prepared for the Pulpit so wrought into your Head and Heart by Review and Meditation, that you may have it at Command, and speak to your Hearers with Freedom; not as if you were reading or repeating your Lesson to them, but as a Man sent to teach and persuade them to Faith and Holiness. Deliver your Discourses to the People like a Man that is talking to them in good Earnest about their most important Concerns, and their everlasting Welfare; like a Messenger sent from Heaven who would fain save Sinners from Hell, and allure Souls to God and Happiness. Do not indulge that lazy way of reading over your prepared Paper, as a School-Boy does an Oration out of *Livy* or *Cicero*, who has no Concern in the Things he speaks. But let all the warmest Zeal for God, and Compassion for perishing Men, animate your Voice and Countenance; and let the People see and feel, as well as hear, that you are speaking to them about Things of infinite Moment, and in which your own eternal Interest lies as well as theirs.

V. If you pray and hope for the Assistance of the Spirit of God in every Part of your Work, do not resolve always to confine your self precisely to the mere Words and Sentences which you have written down

in your private Preparations. Far be it from me to encourage a Preacher to venture into publick Work without due Preparation by Study, and a regular Composure of his Discourse. We must not serve God with what cost us nothing. All our wisest Thoughts and Cares are due to the sacred Service of the Temple: But what I mean is, that we should not impose upon our selves just such a Number of precomposed Words and Lines to be delivered in the Hour, without daring to speak a warm Sentiment that comes fresh upon the Mind. Why may you not hope for some lively Turns of Thought, some new pious Sentiments which may strike Light, and Heat, and Life into the Understandings and the Hearts of those that hear you? In the Zeal of your Ministrations, why may you not expect some bright and warm and pathetick Forms of Argument and Persuasion to offer themselves to your Lips, for the more powerful Conviction of Sinners, and the Encouragement and Comfort of humble Christians? Have you not often found such an Inlargement of Thought, such a Variety of Sentiment and Freedom of Speech, in common Conversation upon an important Subject, beyond what you were apprized of before-hand? And why should you forbid your self this natural Advantage in the Pulpit, and in
the

the Fervour of sacred Ministrations, where also you have more Reason to hope for divine Assistance?

Besides, for us who are Protestant Dissenters, and confine our selves to no set Forms in *Prayer*, it seems more unreasonable to confine our Lips constantly and precisely to the Words written in our Papers in the Work of *Preaching*. Do we plead so earnestly for the Liberty of Prayer, and yet never give our Spirits a Liberty to express their present warm, lively and affectionate Thoughts, in ministring the Gospel of *Christ* under the Hopes of his Assistance? Why must we never dare to add any Thing to our premeditated Notes in speaking to the People, while we can take this Freedom in speaking to the blessed God? As there has been many a fervent and devout Petition offered to God in our Addresses to him, which has not been thought of before, so many a Sentence that was never written has been delivered in our Addresses to the People with glorious Success; it has come more immediate and warm from the Heart, and may have been bless'd of God to save a Soul.

VI. Here would be a proper Place to interpose a few Directions concerning *Elocution*, and the whole Manner of *Delivery of your Discourse* to the People; which includes both a Voice, Gesture and Behaviour suited

to the Subject and Design of every Part of the Sermon. But the Rules that are necessary for this Part of our Work, are much better derived from Books written on this Subject, from an Observation of the best Preachers, in order to imitate them, and an Avoidance of that which we find offensive when we ourselves are Hearers. Besides, as I have had an Opportunity sometimes, my dear Brother, of attending your Performances in publick, I think I may be bold to say, that in this as well as in several other Parts of your Ministration, you stand in no need of any Advice I can give. But since you have called me at present to this Service, I have endeavoured to fulfil it.

If I had a design to go thro' the Whole of the Ministerial Office, I should here also find a proper Place to speak of the Manner of your Performance of *publick Prayer*, of your Direction of the Person who leads the Psalm in that Part of Worship which is called *Psalmody*, and in your Ministration of the Ordinances of *Baptism* and the *Lord's Supper*; but this would require much more Time, and my chief Design was to put you in mind of a few useful Things which relate to *Preaching*. I proceed therefore to the last Particular.

VII. Be very solicitous about the Success of all your Labours in the Pulpit. Water the Seed sown not only with publick, but
secret

secret Prayer. Plead with God importunately, that he would not suffer you to labour in vain. Be not like that foolish Bird the Ostrich, which lays her Eggs in the Dust, and leaves them there, regardless whether they come to Life or not : *God hath not given her Understanding*, Job xxxix. 14—17. But let not this Folly be your Character or Practice : Labour, and watch, and pray, that your Sermons and the Fruit of your Studies may become Words of divine Life to Souls.

'Tis an Observation of pious Mr. *Baxter's*, which I have read somewhere in his Works, that he has never known any considerable Success from the brightest and noblest Talents, nor the most excellent kind of Preaching ; and that even where the Preachers themselves have been truly religious, if they have not had a solicitous Concern for the Success of their Ministrations. Let the awful and important Thoughts of *Souls being saved by my Preaching, or left to perish and be condemned to Hell by my Negligence*, I say, let this awful and tremendous Thought dwell ever upon your Spirit. We are made *Watchmen to the House of Israel*, as *Ezekiel* was, Ezek. iii. 17, &c. and if *we give no Warning of approaching Danger*, the Souls of Multitudes *may perish thro' our Neglect*, but the Blood of Souls will be terribly *required at our Hands*.

SECTION IV.

Of the Conversation of a Minister.

WE are come now to the *Fourth* and last Thing which I proposed, in order to the *fulfilling of your Ministry*, viz. *Take heed to your whole Conversation in the World; let that be managed not only as becomes a Professor of Christianity, but as becomes a Minister of the Gospel of Christ.* Now amongst other Rules which may render your Conversation agreeable to your Character, I entreat you to take these few into your Thoughts.

I. *Let it be blameless and inoffensive.* Be vigilant, be temperate in all Things, not only as a *Soldier of Christ*, but as an Under-leader of part of his Army. Be temperate, and abstain sometimes even from lawful Delights, that you may make the Work of Self-denial easy, and that you may *bear Hardship as becomes a Soldier*, 2 Tim. ii. 3. Be watchful or vigilant, lest you be too much entangled with the *Affairs of this Life*, that you may better please him who has chosen you for an Officer in his Battalions, and that you may not be easily surprized into the Snares of Sin. Guard against a Love of Pleasure, a sensual Temper, an Indulgence of Appetite, an excessive Relish
of

Of the Conversation of a Minister. 81

of Wine or Dainties ; this carnalizes the Soul, and gives Occasion to the World to reproach us but too justly.

Watch carefully in all your Conduct, that you give no offence, as far as possible, neither to Jew or Gentile, nor to the Church of God, that so the Ministry may not be blamed, 1 Cor. x. 32. 2 Cor. vi. 3. Maintain a holy Jealousy over your self and your Conduct, that the Name of *Christ* and his Gospel suffer not the Reproach of Tongues and impious Blasphemies thro' your Means. Oh how dreadful is the Mischief that a scandalous Minister does to the Gospel of our blessed Lord ! What a fearful Train of Consequences may attend his Indulgence of any sinful Appetite, or any single criminal Action, even tho' it be not repeated ! What a fatal Stumbling-block does he lay before the Feet of Saints and Sinners ! He turns away the Heart of Sinners from God and Religion, who perhaps began to think of setting their Faces towards Heaven : He discourages the Hearts of young Christians, and weakens the Hands of all the Friends of *Christ*. *Woe be to the Preacher by whom such Offences come.*

II. Let your Conversation be exemplary in all the Duties of Holiness and Virtue, in all the Instances of Worship and Piety toward God, and in those of Justice, Honour, and hearty Benevolence towards Men. Be

82 *Of the Conversation of a Minister.*

forward and ready to engage in every good Word and Work, that you may be a Pattern and a Leader of the Flock, that you may be able to address the People committed to your Care in the Language of the blessed Apostle, *Be ye Followers of me even as I also am of Christ: Brethren, be Followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for Ensample, for our Conversation is in Heaven. Those Things which ye have both learned and received, and heard and seen in me, do you practise, and the God of Peace shall be with you,* 1 Cor. xi. 1. Phil. iii. 17, 20. Phil. iv. 9.

III. Let your Conversation be grave and manly, yet pleasant and engaging. Let it be grave, manly, and venerable: Remember your Station in the Church, that you sink not into Levity and vain Trifling, that you indulge not any ridiculous Humours or childish Follies, below the Dignity of your Character: Keep up the Honour of your Office among Men by a remarkable Sanctity of Manners, by a decent and manly Deportment. Remember that our Station does not permit any of us to set up for a Buffoon; nor will it be any Glory to us to excel in Farce and Comedy. Let others obtain the Honour of being good Jesters, and of having it in their power to spread a Laugh round the Company when they please: But let it be our Ambition to act

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Of the Conversation of a Minister. 83

on the Stage of Life as Men who are devoted to the Service of the God of Heaven, to the real Benefit of Mankind on Earth, and to their eternal Interests.

Yet there is no need that your Behaviour should have any thing stiff or haughty, any thing fullen or gloomy in it : There is an Art of pleasing in Conversation that will maintain the Honour of a superior Office without a morose Silence, without an affected Stiffness, and without a haughty Superiority. A pleasant Story may proceed without offence from a Minister's Lips ; but he should never aim at the Title of a Man of Mirth, nor abound in such Tales as carry no useful Instruction in them, no Lessons of Piety, or Wisdom, or Virtue.

Let a cheerful Freedom, a generous Friendship, and an innocent Pleasure generally appear on your Countenance ; and let your Speech be ever kind and affectionate. Do not put on any forbidding Airs, nor let the humblest Soul be afraid to speak to you. Let your whole Carriage be civil and affable ; let your Address to Men be usually open and free, such as may allure Persons to be open and free with you in the important Concerns of their Souls. Seek as far as possible to obtain all your pious Designs by soft and gentle Methods of Persuasion.

If you are ever called to the displeasing and painful Work of *Reproof*, this may be

84 *Of the Conversation of a Minister.*

done effectually upon some Occasions without speaking a Word. When vicious, or uncleanly, or unbecoming Speeches arise in publick Conversation, a sudden Silence with an assumed Gravity will often be a sensible and sufficient Reproof. Or where Words of Admonition may not be proper because of the Company, sometimes a sudden Departure may be the best way to acquaint them with your Disapprobation.

But there are Cases wherein such a tacit Rebuke is not sufficient to answer your Character and your Office. Sometimes 'tis necessary for a Minister to bear a publick and express Witness against shocking Immorality, or against vile and impious Discourse. Yet in general it must be said, if a Reproof can be given in secret, 'tis best, and most likely to prevail upon the Offender, because it less irritates his Passions, nor awakens his Pride to vindicate himself, and to despise all Reproof.

Whensoever Providence calls you to this Work, make it appear to the Transgressor that you do it with Regret and Pain: Let him see that you are not giving vent to your own Wrath, but seeking his Interest and Welfare; and that were it not for the Honour of God, and for his Good, you would gladly excuse your self from the ungrateful Task; and that it is a Work in which your Spirit takes no delight. If the Case and
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Of the Conversation of a Minister. 85

Circumstances require some Speeches that are awful and severe, let it appear still that your Love and Pity are the prevailing Passions, and that even your Anger has something divine and holy in it, as being raised and pointed against the Sin rather than against the Sinner.

Study to make the whole of your Carriage and Discourse amongst Men so engaging, as may invite even Strangers to love you, and allure them to love Religion for your sake.

IV. In order to attain the same End, let your Conversation be attended with much Self-denial and Meekness: Avoid the Character of a Humourist, nor be unreasonably fond of little Things, nor peevish for the want of them. Suppress rising Passion early. If you are providentially led into Argument and Dispute, whether on Themes of Belief or Practice, be very watchful lest you run into fierce Contention, into angry and noisy Debate. Guard against every Word that favours of Malice, or of bitter Strife: Watch against the first Stirrings of sudden Wrath or Resentment: Bear with Patience the Contradiction of others, and forbear to *return Railing for Railing*. A Minister *must be gentle, and not apt to strive, but meekly instructing Gainsayers.*

He

86 *Of the Conversation of a Minister.*

He should never be ready either to give or take Offence, but he should teach his People to neglect and bury Resentment, to be deaf to Reproaches, and to forgive Injuries, by his own Example, even as God has forgiven all of us. Let us imitate his divine Pattern who cancels and forgives our infinite Offences for the sake of *Jesus Christ*. *A Bishop must not be a Brawler or a Striker, but such as the Apostle was, gentle among the People, even as a Nurse cherishes her Children; and being effectually desirous of their Welfare, we should be willing to impart not only the Gospel of God to them, but any thing that is dear to us, for the Salvation of their Souls.*

Never suffer any Differences (if possible) to arise between you and any of the People who are committed to your Care, or attend on your Ministrations: This will endanger the Success of your best Labours among them, and for this Reason, tho' you visit Families with Freedom, yet avoid all unnecessary Enquiries into their domestick Affairs by a prying Curiosity; the Pleasure of such Secrets will never pay for the Danger that attends them, and your own Business is sufficient for you.

Avoid entring into any of the little private and personal Quarrels that may arise among them, unless Providence give you an evident Call to become a Peace-maker:
But

Of the Conversation of a Minister. 87

But even in this blessed Work there is some Danger of disobliging one Side or the other ; for though both Sides are often to blame, yet each supposes himself so much in the right, that your softest and most candid Intimation of their being culpable even in little Things, will sometimes awaken the Jealousy of one or both Parties against you ; this will tend to abate their Esteem of you, and give a Coldness to their Attention on your sacred Services. We had need be *wise as Serpents in this Case, and harmless as Doves.*

V. Let your Conversation be as fruitful and edifying as your Station and Opportunities will allow. Wheresoever you come, endeavour (if possible) that the World may be the better for you. If it be the Duty of every Christian, much more is it the indispensable Duty of a Minister of *Christ*, to *take heed that no corrupt Communication proceed out of his Mouth, but that which is good for Edification, that it may minister Grace to the Hearers,* Ephes. iv. 29.

In your private Visits to the Members of your Flocks, or to the Houses of those who attend on your Ministry, depart not (if possible) without putting in some Word for God and Religion, for *Christ* and his Gospel : Take Occasion from common Occurrences that arise, artfully and insensibly to introduce some Discourse of Things sacred.

Let

88 *Of the Conversation of a Minister.*

Let it be done with Prudence and holy Skill, that the Company may be led into it ere they are aware. The ingenious Mr. *Norris's* little Discourse of *Religious Conversation*, and Mr. *Matthew Henry's* Sermon of *Friendly Visits*, have many excellent and valuable Hints in them for our Use.

'Tis to be confess'd, that the best of Ministers and Christians sometimes fall into such Company, that 'tis hardly possible to speak a Word for God and the Gospel among them. Try then whether you cannot introduce a Word of human Virtue, of Goodness, Meekness, Humility or Temperance. Try whether you cannot lead the Discourse to some useful Theme in Matters of Science, Art and Ingenuity, or to Rules of Prudence, Morality, or human Conduct. There is a Time of *keeping silence, and restraining our Lips as with a Bridle, even from every thing that is piously Good, while some sort of wicked Men stand before us.* The best Men are sometimes *dumb with Silence*, and dare not speak of God or Religion, lest they should *cast their Pearls before Swine, and give their Holy Things to Dogs*, and lest they should provoke the unclean or the envious Animals to foam out their Impurities, or *to turn again and rend them.* But I doubt this Caution has been carried much farther by our own Cowardice and Carnality of Spirit, than *David* ever practis'd it in the 39th *Psalms*,

Of the Conversation of a Minister. 89

Pſalm, or than *Jeſus Chriſt* meant it in the 7th of *Matthew*. Let us take heed then that we abuſe not this prudent Caution to a manifeſt Neglect of our Duty, and to with-hold our Lips from the Things of God, where Providence gives us a fair Opportunity to ſpeak of them.

Now and then take occaſion to ſpeak a kind and religious Word to the Children of the Houſhold; put them in mind of avoiding ſome childiſh Folly, or of practiſing ſome Duty that belongs to their Age. Let your Memory be well furniſhed with the Words of Scripture ſuited to the ſeveral Ages of Mankind, as well as to the various Occaſions of Life, that *out of the Abundance of the Heart your Mouth may ſpeak* to the Advantage of all that hear you, and particularly improve the younger Parts of Mankind, who are the Hopes of the next Generation. Make the Lambs of the Flock love you, and hear your Voice with Delight, that they may grow up under your Inſtruction to fill up the Room of their Fathers when they are called away to Heaven: Nor let Servants be utterly neglected, where Providence may afford you an Opportunity to ſpeak a Word to their Souls.

Learn what are the ſpiritual Circumſtances of the Families whom you viſit, and addreſs them *with a Word in Season* where you can have proper Opportunity. Converſe
perſonally

90 *Of the Conversation of a Minister.*

personally with them (if you can) about their eternal Concerns. Let the Ease and Gentleness of your Addresses to them, in a natural and familiar Way, take off all that shy and bashful Tincture from their Minds, that is ready to prevent their uttering a Word about the Concern of their Souls. Inquire tenderly into their State with regard to God : Draw Sinners by Words of Compassion to repent of their Crimes, to return to God, and to trust in *Jesus* the Saviour. Teach Christians sincerely to love and practise Duty, and to endure with Honour the Trials of Life. Teach them to be sick and die as becomes the Disciples of *Christ*. Treasure up your own Experiences of divine Things, not only as Matters of delightful Review in your own Retirements, and for the Encouragement of your own Hope, but as Lessons to be taught your People upon all proper Occasions. *Whether you are afflicted, or whether you are comforted, let it be for their Consolation and Salvation.* 2 Cor. i. 6.

A Minister, whose Business and known Employment is to speak of the Things of God, should never be ashamed to impart divine Knowledge, or to exhort to Holiness with his Lips, and to preach the Word of the Gospel of Grace, whether the World calls it *in Season or out of Season*, 2 Tim. iv. 1. He that has the happy Talent of *Parlour Preaching*,

Of the Conversation of a Minister. 91

Preaching, has sometimes done more for *Christ* and Souls in the space of a few Minutes, than by the Labour of many Hours and Days in the usual Course of Preaching in the Pulpit. Our Character should be all of a piece, and we should help forward the Success of our publick Ministrations by our private Addresses to the Hearts and Consciences of Men, where Providence favours us with just Occasions.

In order to promote this Work of particular Watchfulness over the Flock of *Christ*, where he has made you a Shepherd and Overseer, 'tis useful to keep a Catalogue of their Names, and now and then review them with a pastoral Eye and Affection. This will awaken and incline you to lift up proper Petitions for each of them, so far as you are acquainted with their Circumstances in Body or Mind. This will excite you to give Thanks to God on account of those who walk as becomes the Gospel, and who have either begun, or proceeded and increased in the Christian Life and Temper by your Ministry: You will observe the Names of the negligent and back-sliding Christians, to mourn over them and admonish them: You will be put in mind how to dispose of your Time in Christian Visits, and learn the better to fulfil your whole Ministry among them.

I shall

I shall enlarge no farther in the Enumeration of our Duties, which would easily swell into a Volume, if they were set before our Eyes in their full Extent : But in general, I say, these are the Methods whereby we must *take heed to our selves if we would fulfil the Ministry that we have received of Christ.* To supply what I have omitted, read frequently, and with holy Attention the Epistle of *Paul to Timothy* and *Titus*, which will furnish you richly with Directions for your Work : And I would recommend to you the Examples of *St. Paul* and *Timothy*, as they are put well together in a little Book by the Reverend Mr. *Murray*, which was printed but a few Years ago. And as the Account of the Lives of many ancient Ministers may furnish us with Patterns for our Imitation, so the Life of the late venerable *Dr. Cotton Mather*, of *New-England*, has many excellent Hints in it for this Purpose, *Chap. 2. Sect. 1. and Chap. 6.*

SECTION V.

A solemn Enforcement of these Exhortations on the Conscience.

THE Things which I have spoken hitherto have been a Display of the best Methods I can think of for the Execution

tion of the sacred Office of the Ministry:
And so far as they are conformable to the
Word of God, we may venture to say,
these are your Duties, my dear Brother,
and these are ours. It remains now to be
considered in what Manner shall we enforce
them on our own Consciences, and on
yours? What solemn Obtestations shall I
use to press these momentous Concerns on
all our Hearts? What pathetick Language
shall I chuse, what Words of awful Efficacy
and divine Fervour, which may first melt
our Spirits into Softness, and then imprint
these Duties upon them with lasting Power:
We exhort and charge you, we exhort and
charge our selves, by all that is serious and
sacred, by all that is important and everlast-
ing, by all the solemn Transactions be-
tween God and Man which are past, and by
all the more solemn and awful Scenes which
are yet to come, by all things in our holy
Religion which are dreadful and tremen-
dous, and by all Things in this Gospel
which are glorious and amiable, heavenly
and divine; we charge you by all that is
written in this Book of God, according to
which we shall be judged in the last Day,
by all the infinite and astonishing Glories
and Terrors of an invisible World and an
unseen Eternity, *we charge and exhort you,*
we exhort and charge our selves, that *we all*
take heed to the Ministry which we have re-
ceived

ceived of the Lord Jesus that we fulfil it. But let us descend to more particular Forms of solemn Exhortation, which perhaps may strike our Consciences in a more sensible Manner, and print the Duties deeper upon our Hearts.

First then, we exhort and charge you, we charge and exhort our own Souls, by all the ancient Transactions between God the Father and his Son *Jesus Christ* for the Salvation of sinful Men, by all the eternal Counsels of Peace that pass'd between them to recover lost Mankind to the Favour and Image of his Maker, that we preach this Gospel with faithfulness, and be instant in the sacred Work. It is the effect of these divine Counsels that we publish to Sinners; 'tis the merciful Product of this sacred Covenant of Redemption that we are sent to proclaim to a lost World: This is the Gospel which is put into our Hands: God grant we may speak as becomes Creatures entrusted with Messages of such a heavenly Original, with Affairs of such divine Solemnity.

Secondly, We exhort and charge you, and we would charge our selves to fulfil our Ministry, by the invaluable Treasure of this Gospel which is put into our Hands, by that Word of Life which is committed to our Ministration. Let us speak with such a serious Zeal as becomes the Oracles of
God

God and the Embassies of his Mercy, with such Compassion to dying Souls as is manifested in this Gospel of Love, with such inward Fervour and holy Solitude for the Success of our Labours, that if it were possible not the Soul of one Sinner within the Reach of our Preaching might miss of this pardoning Mercy and eternal Joy. Oh let us not dare to trifle with God or Men : Let us not be cold and lifeless in pronouncing the Words of everlasting Life, nor lazy and indolent in carrying these Errands of divine Love to a lost and perishing World.

Thirdly, We charge and beseech you, and we charge our selves, by the Mercies of the living God, which we hope both you and we have tasted, by the Grace of our Lord *Jesus Christ*, which we hope we have felt and received, that you and we proclaim these Mercies with a sacred Zeal, and that in the Name of God and of our Lord *Jesus* we offer them to a miserable World with holy Importunity.

If ever we have known this wondrous Compassion of God to our selves, if ever we have *tasted that the Lord is gracious*, let us remember the Relish we have had of this infinite Compassion and condescending Grace, when we were perishing under the Power and Guilt of Sin ; and with an Imitation of that divine Piety, let us entreat Sinners to be saved. Let us remember all
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96 *A solemn Enforcement of these*

the alluring Charms, the heavenly Sweetnesses of forgiving, sanctifying and saving Grace ; and do our utmost to set them all before Sinners in the most inviting Light, that we may win sinful Men to accept of the same Salvation.

Fourthly, We exhort and charge you, and we charge our selves, by the dear and glorious Name of our blessed JESUS, whose Servants we are, whose Name we bear, whose Authority gives us Commission, and who hath chosen us to be the Ministers of his Grace, the Messengers of his dying Love to the Sons of Men ; we charge and beseech you to take care of the Honour of his Name in your Ministrations, for we are sent forth to display before the Eyes of the World the *unsearchable Riches of Christ* : We are intrusted to spread abroad the Honours of his Name ; O let us labour and strive that our Zeal bear some proportion to the Dignity of our Trust, and let us take heed that we do nothing unworthy of our great and glorious Master in Heaven, who dwells at the Right hand of God ; nothing unworthy of that holy and illustrious Name, in which we are sent forth to preach this Gospel, and to enlarge his Kingdom. He has set us up as *Lights upon a Hill* in this sinful World, this benighted Part of his Dominion ; let us burn and shine to his Honour. He has assumed and placed us as

Stars

Stars in his Right-hand, let us shine and burn gloriously, that we may give Light to a midnight World. O that we may point out to them the *Morning-star*, that we may bring them under the Beams of the *rising Sun of Righteousness*, and guide them in the way to the Hills of Paradise and everlasting Joy!

Fifthly, We beseech and charge you, while we charge our selves, by the inestimable Value of the Blood of *Christ* which purchased this Salvation, that you and we display this illustrious and costly Purchase to sinful perishing Creatures; this precious Blood, which is sufficient to redeem a World from Death, and which is the Price of all our infinite and everlasting Blessings, demands that we publish and offer them in his Name, with holy Zeal and Sollicitude, to sinful Men. Oh may our Hearts and our Lips join to proclaim this Redemption, this Salvation, these everlasting Blessings, with such a devout and sacred Passion as becomes the divine Price that was paid for them. Let us not be found Triflers with the Blood of *Christ*, nor let us bring cold Hearts and dead Affections when we come to set before Sinners the rich and inestimable Stream of that Life and Blood that comes warm from the Heart of the dying Son of God. Let perishing Creatures know that it cost the Prince of Glory such a dreadful

98 *A solemn Enforcement of these*

Price as this to redeem them from eternal Misery ; and at the same time let our own Spirits feel the powerful Workings of Gratitude to the divine Friend that bled and died for us, and let our Language make it appear that we speak what we feel.

Sixtly, We intreat you with all Tendernefs, and with holy Solemnity and Fear, we charge you and we charge our selves, by the invaluable Worth of perishing Souls, that we fulfil all our Ministry with a Concern of Heart equal to so important a Case. How can we dare to speak with lifeless Lips, with cold Language, or a careless Air, when we are sent to recover immortal Souls from the Brink of everlasting Death ? Oh let it never be said, that such or such a Soul was lost for ever thro' our Carelessness, thro' our Coldness, thro' our sinful Sloth in publishing the Offers of recovering Grace. How tremendous and painful will such a Thought be to our Hearts ! How dreadful the Anguish of it to the awakened Conscience of a drowsy Preacher !

Seventhly, We charge you solemnly, and we charge our selves, by the Honour that *Christ* has done to us in Times past, and has done to you this Day, by the Dignity of that Office with which we have been formerly invested, and which you have this Day received, that neither you nor we do any thing unbecoming this honourable Character.

racter. Does *Jesus* the divine Shepherd appoint us *Under-Shepherds* of his Flock, are we constituted *Stewards* in his House, to dispense the Mysteries of his Grace, and the good things of his Gospel; are we the *Messengers* of our risen Lord to a dying World, are we the *Ministers* of our exalted Saviour in his Kingdom here below, are we the *Stars in his right Hand*, are we the earthly *Angels* of his Churches? Oh let us take heed that we do nothing to disgrace the Titles of Dignity and Honour which he has put upon us in his Word: Let us remember that every Dignity brings an equal Duty with it; and by fulfilling the various and difficult Duties of our holy Station, let us make it appear that our Office was not conferred upon us in vain.

It behoves us well to remember that a Blemish upon the Name of a Minister, arising from his own criminal Conduct, brings a foul and lasting Scandal upon the Office it self, and upon the Gospel of our glorified Lord, in whose Name we act: And he will not fail to resent it.

Eighthly, We exhort and charge you therefore, my dear Brother, by all the sacred Solemnities of this Day, by the Vows of God which you have this Day taken upon your self, and the Bond wherewith you have bound your Soul; and we would each of us charge our own Consciences, by our

own former solemn Vows, that neither you nor we ever suffer our selves to forget or disregard our holy and powerful Engagements; that we be awake at all times to fulfil our Work, and that we never indulge low and trifling Thoughts of what has formerly appeared to us, and what this Day appears to you of such awful Importance. Oh let us ever refresh upon our Spirits the serious and important Transactions of that Day wherein we gave up our selves to *Christ*, in the sacred Service of his Church. Let us often review the Vows of these remarkable Seasons of our Life, and renew and confirm them before the Lord.

Ninthly, We charge you, and we charge our selves, by the decaying Interest of Religion, and the withering State of Christianity at this day, that we do not increase this general and lamentable Decay, this growing and dreadful Apostacy, by our slothful and careless Management of the Trust which is committed to us. 'Tis a divine Interest indeed, but declining; 'tis a heavenly Cause, but among us 'tis sinking and dying. O let us stir up our Hearts, and all that is within us, and strive mightily in Prayer and in Preaching to revive the Work of God, and beg earnestly that God, by a fresh and abundant Effusion of his own Spirit, would revive his own Work among us. *Revive thy own Work, O Lord,*

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in the midst of these Years of Sin and Degeneracy, nor let us labour in vain. Where is thy Zeal, O Lord, and thy Strength, the Sounding of thy Bowels and thy Mercies? Are they restrained? O let us rouse our Souls with all holy Fervour to fulfil our Ministry, for 'twill be a dreadful Reproach upon us, and a Burthen too heavy for us to bear, if we let the Cause of *Christ* and Godliness die under our Hands for want of a lively Zeal, and pious Fervour and Faithfulness in our Ministrations.

Tenthly, We entreat, we exhort and charge you, and we charge our selves, by the solemn and awful Circumstances of a dying Bed, and the Thoughts of Conscience in that important Hour, when we shall enter into the World of Spirits, that we take heed to the Ministry which we have received : Surely that Hour is hastening upon us, when our Heads will lie on a dying Pillow. When a few more Mornings and Evenings have visited our Windows, the Shadows of a long Night will begin to spread themselves over us : In that gloomy Hour, Conscience will review the Behaviour of the Days that are past, will take Account of the Conduct of our whole Lives, and will particularly examine our Labours and Cares in our sacred Office. Oh may we ever dread the Thoughts of making bitter Work for Repentance in that Hour, and of trea-

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suring

furing up Terrors for a Death-bed by a careless and useleſs Miniſtry.

Eleventhly, We exhort and charge you, and we charge our ſelves, by our gathering together before the Throne of our Lord *Jeſus Chriſt*, and the ſolemn Account we muſt there give of the Miniſtry with which he hath entrusted us, that we prepare by our preſent Zeal and Labour to render that moſt awful Scene peaceful to our Souls, and the Iſſue of it joyful and happy. Let us look forward to that illuſtrious and tremendous Appearance, when our Lord ſhall come with ten thouſands of his holy Angels to enquire into the Conduct of Men, and particularly of the Miniſters of his Kingdom here on Earth. Let us remember that we ſhall be examined in the Light of the Flames of that Day, *What we have done with his Goſpel which he gave us to preach? What we have done with his Promiſes of rich Salvation, which he ſent us to offer in his Name?* What is become of the Souls committed to our Care? O that we may give up our Account with Joy, and not with Grief, to the Judge of the Living and the Dead, in that glorious, that dreadful and deciſive Hour.

Twelfthly, We charge and warn you, my dear Brother, and we warn and charge our ſelves, by all the Terrors written in this di-
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vine Book, and by all the Indignation and Vengeance of God, which we are sent to display before a sinful World, by all the Torments and Agonies of Hell, which we are commissioned to denounce against impenitent Sinners, in order to persuade Men to turn to God and receive and obey the Gospel, that we take heed to our Ministry that we fulfil it. This Vengeance and these Terrors will fall upon our Souls, and that with intolerable Weight, with double and immortal Anguish, if we have trifled with these terrible Solemnities, and made no use of these awful Scenes to awaken Men to lay hold of the offered Grace of the Gospel. *Knowing therefore the Terrors of the Lord, let us persuade Men, for we must all stand before the Judgment-Seat of Christ, to receive according to our Works,* 2 Cor. v. 10, 11.

In the last place, We intreat, we exhort and charge you, by all the Joys of Paradise, and the Blessings of an eternal Heaven, which are our Hope and Support under all our Labours, and which in the Name of *Christ* we offer to sinful perishing Men, and invite them to partake thereof: Can we speak of such Joys and Glories with a sleepy Heart and indolent Language? Can we invite Sinners who are running headlong into Hell to return and partake of these Felicities, and not be excited to the warmest Forms of Address, and the most

lively and engaging Methods of Persuasion ? What Scenes of Brightness and Delight can animate the Lips and Language of an Orator, if the Glories and the Joys of the Christian Heaven and our immortal Hopes cannot do it ? We charge and entreat you therefore, and we charge our selves, by the shining Recompences which are promised to faithful Ministers, that we keep this Glory ever in view, and awaken our dying Zeal in our sacred Work. There is a *Crown of Righteousness laid up for those who have fought the good Fight, who have finished their Course, who have kept the Faith,* 2 Tim. iv. 7. There is a *Glory which is to be revealed, a Crown of Glory which fadeth not away,* prepared for every Under-Shepherd who shall feed the Flock of God under his Care, and be found faithful in his Work : *When the great Shepherd shall appear, he himself will bestow it on them.* O let us look up continually to this immortal Crown. Let us shake off our Sluggishness, and rouse all our active Powers at the prospect of this Felicity. Let us labour and strive with all our Might, that we may become Possessors of this bright Reward.

Before we conclude this Exhortation, let us try to enforce it still with more Power, by considering in whose Presence are these Solemnities transacted, and these Charges given.

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We exhort and charge you then, in the Presence of this Church, who hath called you to minister to them in Holy Things, and who give up their Souls this Day to your Care, to your Instructions, to your Conduct in the Ministrations of the Gospel. We charge and exhort you that you take the Over-sight of them with all Humility and Diligence, and sacred Delight, that you make the Life of their Souls your perpetual Care, that none of them may be lost thro' your Default.

We exhort and charge you in the Presence of this whole Assembly, who are met together to behold and hear our Faith and Order in the Gospel. They are Witnesses of the solemn Obligations you have this Day laid your self under, and will be called as Witnesses against you in the Day of *Christ*, if you take no care to perform your sacred Vows.

We exhort and charge you, in the Presence of the holy and elect Angels, who are continually waiting in their Ministry on the Saints in the Church, and viewing with delight the Ministration of the Gospel of *Christ*, their Lord and ours, as 'tis managed by the Hands of Men. They see, they hear, and they will bear record against you ; a dreadful Record of broken Vows and faithless Promises, if you are found careless and unfaithful.

106 *A solemn Enforcement of these*

Forgive me, dear Brother, forgive the solemn Language of these Exhortations; we hope, we believe, we are persuaded your Heart is right with God, and you will be found faithful in that Day, and that Men and Angels will be Witnesses of your Zeal and your Labours in the sacred Work. But we also feel so much Coldness in our own Spirits, that we have need to address you and our selves in most solemn and awful Language.

We charge you then finally in the Presence of God, the great God, the All-knowing and Almighty, the Universal Governour and Judge, and our Lord *Jesus Christ*, to whom *he hath committed all Judgement*, who hath *Eyes as a Flame of Fire* to see thro' our Hearts and Souls; we charge you, and we charge our selves, under the all-seeing Eye of the great God and of his Son *Jesus* our Lord, that with holy Care and Diligence both we and you fulfil the Work of our Ministry with which *Christ* hath intrusted us, that we may approve our selves to him in Zeal and Faithfulness and Love, in Zeal for his Honour and his Gospel, in Faithfulness to our sacred Commission, and in Love and Pity to the Souls of Men.

If Sinners will continue obstinate and impenitent, after all our pious Cares, Labours and Prayers, their Blood will not lie at our door;

door; *our Work is left with the Lord, and our Judgment and Reward with our God, Isa. xlix. 4.* But if it be possible, we should with utmost Earnestness and Compassion seize the Souls of Sinners who are on the very Borders of Hell, we should *pluck them like Brands out of the Fire*, and save them from burning, *Jude 23.*

O may the Spirit of the blessed God favour us with his divine Aids, that we may bring home many Wanderers to the Fold of *Christ* the great Shepherd, that we may rescue many Souls from Death, who may be *our Joy and Crown and Glory in the Day of the Lord Jesus!* May this be your Happiness, my dear Brother, may this be mine! May this be the Happiness of every one of us who minister in Holy Things, through the abounding Grace of *Christ* and the Influences of his Spirit: And may it be the Happiness of all who in different Places attend our constant holy Ministrations, and particularly of all that hear us this Day, to stand and appear with us before the Judgment-Seat of *Christ* with mutual Delight and Joy: And may each of us who preach and hear, receive our proper Portion of the everlasting Recompence and Glory which shall be assigned to those who are faithful by *Jesus* our Saviour and our Judge, *to whom be Dominion and Praise for ever and ever.* Amen.

THAT excellent Sermon which our Lord preached on the Mount seems to be addressed in a special manner to his Disciples, tho' a mixed Multitude might attend to hear it. The first Verse of the Chapter tells us that *Jesus seeing the Multitude, went up into a Mountain; and when he was set, his Disciples came to him, and he opened his Mouth and taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in Spirit: And* there are several Expressions in the Sermon which plainly shew that the Discourse was chiefly directed to the Disciples, *Matth. v. 13, &c. Ye are the Salt of the Earth, ye are the Light of the World; which he would never say to a Multitude of mixed People that*

that followed him, made up probably of *Galilean Gentiles* as well as *Jews*.

The Words I have chosen are a warm and pathetick Question put to the Consciences of the Disciples, with regard to the great Duty of Charity and Love, which our blessed Saviour had been just preaching in sublimer Degrees than the ancient Prophets, *If you salute none but your Brethren, if you love only those that love you ; or as Luke vi. 33. If ye do good to them that do good to you, what do you more than others ? For the Publicans and Sinners do the same.* Persons who make no Pretences to Godliness, and who neither enjoy the *Advantages* with which you are blessed, nor lie under equal *Engagements* : They love their own Friends as well as you, and make grateful Returns for Benefits received ; they practise many Duties of Morality, but I expect that you my Disciples should far excel them, both in the Duties you practise, and in the Manner of Performance : I expect that you should *love your Enemies, and should bless them that curse you, and do good to them that hate you*, as in *Verse 44.* What is here spoken thus warmly by our Lord to his own Disciples, concerning Love and Civility and Kindness to our Fellow-Creatures, may with the same Justice be applied to most of the Duties which we owe to God or Man, and give us ground
to

to raise this general Doctrine or Theme of Discourse.

Doctrine. *God requires and expects higher Improvements in Virtue and Religion from Persons who enjoy peculiar Advantages, or lie under special Obligations.*

Now to improve this Thought, and press it upon all our Consciences, I shall enquire, 1. What are the Circumstances under which the Disciples of *Christ* then lay that obliged them to superior Virtue and Goodness ; and 2. I shall endeavour to apply this to our selves, by enquiring what peculiar Circumstances of Advantage and Obligation, all or any of us lie under to exceed others in any Instances of Duty, either to God or our Neighbour, and whether we have answered these Engagements or no.

In answer to the first Enquiry, *What were the Circumstances of the Disciples at this Time?* We may consider our Saviour in this Sermon exhorting them to superior Degrees of Goodness, as they appeared under these two Characters ; (1.) as they were *Jews* and not *Heathens*, as a part of the Nation and Church of *Israel*, in distinction from the Men of other Nations or *Gentiles* ; or (2.) as they were the Disciples of *Christ*, and not of the *Scribes* or *Pharisees* ; as they were Followers of a new Preacher, who was neither authorized nor acknowledged by their Priests and Doctors of the Law, who

who had no Countenance from the established national Church, and who frequently worshipped in separate Assemblies *.

And there is good Reason for this two-fold Consideration of them, if we remember that in my Text *Christ* compares his Disciples with *Publicans*, or the Gatherers of the Taxes whom the *Roman* Governors appointed, who were most of them *Heathens*, and were often guilty of Oppression and Injustice, and therefore he demands of his Disciples greater Degrees of Goodness than they ever practised: And in the 20th Verse of this Chapter he compares them with the *Scribes* and *Pharisees*, the strict Pretenders to Religion, and the Teachers of it among the *Jews*; and assures them, that *except their Righteousness exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees, they shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.*

* It is granted indeed, that our blessed Saviour did not separate himself from the *Jewish* national Church, so as to abstain from the Worship of the Temple, because that was expressly of God's own Establishment; nor did he avoid the Synagogues while they would suffer him to preach there, and to warn the People against their Traditions: yet there were so many Corruptions in that Day that had crept into the national Church, that he found he could not fulfil his Ministry, nor promote the Salvation of Souls according to his Desire, and his heavenly Commission, without holding separate Assemblies.

I. If we consider the Disciples of *Christ* as *Jews*, as *a Part of the Nation and Church of Israel*, they had many special Advantages for Religion above the *Heathen* World, and many peculiar Obligations. They were interested in those special Marks of Honour and Love that God had set upon the *Jewish* Nation, they were chosen to be a *peculiar People to the Lord*, and were devoted to him from their Infancy : They had their Laws given them by God himself, as their King and Governor, and could have no doubt of the Wisdom and Justice and Equity of them : They had a Multitude of special Revelations both of Duty and Grace from God as their King and their God, from God as the Object of their Worship and their everlasting Rewarder : They had the living Oracles committed to them for their Instruction, wherein divine Truths and Duties were written down in plain Language, as the Lessons of their Faith and the Rules of their Practice : They had many Institutions of Religion and Worship dictated by God himself, and they were not left to the wild and uncertain Fancies of Men to invent Ceremonies of their own which God will never approve : They had the Gospel preached to them under Types and Shadows, and there were many clear Discoveries of the Forgiveness of Sin and Reconciliation to God to be obtained for Sinners who return

turn to God by Repetance, and who rely on the Promises of his Grace. Well might our Saviour say, I expect from you superior Degrees of Religion and Virtue above the *Heathen* and the *Publican*, above the *Roman Tax-gatherers* that dwell amongst you, and even those of your own Nation who make no strict Profession of Piety or Goodness. Think with your selves therefore, examine your Hearts and Practice, *What do you more than they?* And let your Consciences be able to give an honourable Answer.

II. Let the Disciples of *Christ* be considered as *Followers of a new Preacher*, in a way of Distinction from the *Disciples of the Scribes* and the *Jewish Doctors of the Law*. They sat under the Ministry of a rising Prophet *Jesus of Galilee*, the supposed Son of a Carpenter, who had no Approbation nor Authority nor Countenance from the established Church, who held separate Assemblies for praying and preaching, and who taught the People sometimes on a Mountain, sometimes in the Wilderness, sometimes on the Sea-shore, and at other times in private Houses; and here we shall find that the Disciples lay under farther Circumstances of Engagement to greater Purity and a higher Perfection in Holiness.

They had the Son of God himself for their Preacher, *who spake so as never Man spake,*

spake, who had all his Doctrines and his Messages from Heaven, and spake what his Father commanded him; a Preacher, who explained the Law in a more perfect Manner, and raised it to sublimer Degrees of Virtue even than *Moses* himself, who received it from God; and he purified it also from the false and corrupt Glosses which the Scribes and Doctors of that degenerate Age had put upon it; an Ambassador from Heaven, who published the Tidings of rich Grace and Pardon and Salvation in a clearer Manner, and gave them stronger Encouragements to Repentance and Faith and Piety and brotherly Love than the World had ever known before.

They had Miracles wrought to convince them of the Truth of the Commission of *Christ* from Heaven, *Matt. iv. 24.* The God of Nature spoke often to them in some Work of Wonder, which was superior to all the Powers of Nature, to assure them that *Jesus* was the Minister of his Father's Grace to the Sons of Men.

They had seen some of the Prophecies fulfilled in him, and some of the Characters of the *Messiah* exemplified in his Person, in his Doctrine and his Conduct; for tho' this Sermon stands near the Beginning of *St. Matthew's* History, yet it was by no means the first Sermon that he preached, nor the very Beginning of his Ministry, as will

will easily appear if we consult *Matt.* iv. and *Luke* iv. where we have several Accounts of his preaching before this.

Let us consider another great Advantage they enjoyed above others ; they had the noblest and most sublime Pattern of Holiness always before them, who practised Self-denial, Humility, Zeal for the Honour of God, Mortification to the World, Resistance of Temptations, and retired Devotion, in a superior manner to what ever any meer Mortal attained or practised.

And besides all this, they made a Profession of greater Strictness and Purity by their Adherence to *Christ* and his Preaching, who appeared in the World as a new Teacher, to reform the Vices of Men, and found fault with the Preachers of the established Church, for the many Corruptions both of Doctrine and Practice that reigned amongst them.

Now, “ To what Purpose (might our
“ Lord say) and for what End are all
“ these Advantages given you, if not to
“ make you wiser and better than the rest
“ of the Nation ? And what is it you pre-
“ tend in following my Sermons and at-
“ tending upon my Ministry in separate
“ Assemblies ? Is it not that you may be-
“ come more strictly religious, and that
“ your Virtue and your Goodness may ex-
“ ceed your Neighbours ? If the Teach-
“ ings

“ ings of the Scribes and the Doctors of the
 “ Law are sufficient for your Instruction,
 “ and equal to your Wishes and your
 “ Hopes, why do ye follow me from
 “ Town to Town, and from one Part of
 “ the Nation to the other ? Does not your
 “ own Profession of being my Disciples
 “ oblige you to greater Degrees of Piety ?
 “ And have you not peculiar Advantages
 “ for this End, by attending on my Mini-
 “ strations ? I expect therefore that you
 “ should live, and speak, and act to the Ho-
 “ nour of God and the Good of Men, in a
 “ Degree and Manner far superior to what
 “ the Sinners and *Publicans* can pretend to,
 “ and that you *exceed in Righteousness* all the
 “ Pretences and the Practices of the Pha-
 “ risees and the Scribes. ”

SECTION II.

*The Application of the Words of the Text to
our own Age and Circumstances.*

THUS having shewn how reasonable
 was this Demand of *Christ* upon his
 own Disciples, we come in the next place to
 apply all this to our own Case, to our own
 Age and Circumstances. And here in order
 to enforce this Enquiry upon our Conscien-
 ces, *What do we more than others ?* we shall
 consider our Character and our Privileges ;

(1.)

(1.) That we are *Christians*, and not *Jews* nor *Heathens*. (2.) That we are *Protestants*, and not *Papists*. (3.) That we are *Protestant Dissenters*, who worship God in separate Assemblies, and follow the Teachings of Men who have no Commission from the established and national Church; and under each of these Characters we shall enquire how much our Circumstances of *Advantage* and *Obligation* are superior to those of the rest of the World from whom we are distinguished, and whether our Behaviour has been answerable to these special Engagements.

I. *We are Christians, and not Jews nor Heathens.* Let me speak to each of these apart.

Ist, We are not born in a Land of *Heathenism*, in gross Darkness and in the Shadow of Death, and therefore our Piety and Virtue should far exceed all the Practices of the *Heathen* World. We are not left to the Teachings of the Book of Nature, and to the silent Lectures which the Sun, Moon and Stars can read us, nor are we abandoned merely to the Instructions of Religion that we may derive from the Beasts of the Earth and the Fowls of the Heaven, or any of the Works of God the Creator.

We are not given up in the Things of Religion merely to the wandering and uncertain Conduct of our Reason, feeble as it
is

is in itself, corrupted by the Fall of *Adam* our first Father, beset with many Sins and Prejudices, and turned aside from the Truth by a thousand false Lights of Sense and Appetite, Fancy and Passion, by the vain Customs of the Country, and the Corruptions of our sinful Hearts.

We are not bewildered among the poor Remains of divine Tradition delivered down from *Adam* to *Noah*, and from *Noah* to his Posterity in the several Nations of the Earth; we are not left to spell out our Duty from those sorry broken Fragments of Revelation, which are so lost and defaced among most of the Nations, and so mingled with monstrous Folly and Delusion, that 'tis hard to find any Reliques of Truth or Goodness in them.

We are not given up to foul Idolatry and wild Superstition, nor to the slavish and tyrannical Dictates of Priests and Kings, who contrive what Ceremonies they please, and impose them on the People, which is the Case of a great Part of the *Heathen* World.

Poor and deluded Creatures! feeling about in the dark for the Way to Happiness, in the midst of Rocks and Precipices and endless Dangers, and led astray into many Mischiefs and Miseries by those whom they take for Guides and Rulers. And what an infamous and shameful Thing would

it be for us, who have the divine Light of the Gospel shining among us to direct our Paths, if we should read among the Records of the *Heathen* Nations, that any of them have behaved better than we have done either in Duties to God or Man, and exceeded us either in personal or in social Virtues? Nay, what a Scandal would it be to our Profession, if we should not abundantly exceed all the shining Virtues of the *Heathen* Nations, since the divine Light that shines upon us, and the divine Lessons that are published amongst us, are so infinitely superior to all that the *Heathen* World has enjoyed?

And yet, to our Shame and Reproach, there are several single Examples found in ancient History of some of their moral and social Virtues, beyond what most of us have arrived at. What Patience under Injuries and cutting Reproaches is ascribed to *Socrates*? What a Contentment of Soul under great Poverty, what Calmness under Oppression and Pain, and what a noble Disinterestedness in the Comforts or Calamities of this Life was found in *Epictetus* the *Stoick* Philosopher? What a friendly and forgiving Spirit in *Antoninus* the Emperor? What a Moderation in the Enjoyments of Life, what a brave Contempt of present Death, and what a generous Love of their Country and Self-denial for the publick

lick Good do we read of in some of the ancient *Romans*, before the Ages of Splendor and Luxury had corrupted them?

'Tis granted indeed these Instances are but few and rare, and we have good reason to hope and believe that the Virtues which are practised in the *Christian* World are abundantly more common and numerous, and therefore they pass without such publick Notice and Renown: But is it not a shame there should be any one Instance of *Heathen* Virtue transcending the Practice of *Christians*?

And if we consult the Histories of their religious Affairs, we shall find several Examples of their Zeal for sorry Superstitions and ridiculous Idolatries, rising higher than ours has done in the Practice of our divine Religion: How far have their Self-denial and Sufferings, their Fatigues and Fervency in the Worship of their Idols, transcended our Devotion to the living and true God? What costly Honours have they done to some of their Mediator Gods and Goddeses, beyond what we have a Heart to do for our *Jesus*, the only true Mediator between God and Man? With what Curiosity and Exactness and unwearied Diligence have the Votaries of those false Deities, in some of the *Eastern* and *Western* Nations, in ancient and later Times, fulfilled their Washings, and Scourgings, and
painful

painful Abstinences, and practised all the austere Rites of their Religions, while we are cold and indifferent, sluggish and indolent in paying the sacred Worship we owe to the great and blessed God and to his Son *Jesus*? Lord, will not this Heathen Zeal condemn our shameful Sloth and Negligence?

Again 2dly, We are *Christians and not Jews*: How much should our Practices of Piety exceed theirs? Our Gospel is not hidden under Types and Figures, nor veiled under the Smoke of Incense and Sacrifice, as it was in the Religion of *Moses*: How cheerfully should we receive and study and rejoice in this Gospel of Salvation, which shines amongst us in its fullest Light? And while we remember that we are freed from the Bondage of numerous Ceremonies, how diligently should we attend to the two sacred Institutions of *Baptism* and the *Lord's Supper*, which *Christ* has given us, and take Care that all the spiritual Designs of them be attained in us and upon us?

We are not waiting for a *Messiah* yet to come, which was the Case of many *Prophets and Kings and righteous Men* under the *Jewish* Dispensation: *Blessed are our Eyes and our Ears, for they have* read and heard those glorious Transactions and Doctrines relating to the *Messiah* the great Prophet, the King of *Israel*, and the Saviour of the

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World, for which the Fathers waited from Age to Age. With what Zeal and Joy, with what holy Exercifes and Raptures of Faith and Love ſhould we receive *Jeſus* the Son of God, the great *Meſſiah*, who has all the Characters of this divine Prophet and this promiſed Saviour found in him? With what a firm and ſteady Soul ſhould we receive the Doctrines, and maintain the Articles of the Religion of *Jeſus*, in Oppoſition to all the Snares of Infidelity, and the Artifices of every Deceiver.

Again, We are not left, as the *Jews* were, to the obſcure Language of Prophecy, to inform us of the Grace and Bleſſings of the *Meſſiah's* Kingdom; nor are we put to ſpell out our Faith by ſuch weak and idle Commentaries of Men as the *Jewiſh* Rabbins have left us, whereby to underſtand the Law of *Moses*: We have the New Teſtament given us to explain the Old: *Chriſt* and his Apoſtles are ſent to us as Interpreters of the ancient Prophets: The Veil is taken away while the Books of *Moses* are read among us, and many of the dark Figures and the typical Scenes of Providence that belonged to the *Jewiſh* Diſpenſation are now unfolded and explained in a divine Light. How ſhould *our Hearts burn within us* under an Evangelical Miniſtry, in Imitation of the two Diſciples, *Luke* xxiv. 32. while *Chriſt* was unfolding to them the ſpi-
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ritual Glories and Graces of his Kingdom, which were delivered by *Moses* and the Prophets in more obscure Language? How delightfully should we converse with the two Books of God, the Old Testament and New, when we understand the Scripture so far beyond what the best of the *Jews* could do, who had only the first of these divine Writings given them, without a second to explain it: How much therefore should our Faith and our Hope, our Love and our Holiness transcend the Virtues and Graces of a *Jew*?

And yet, alas! how greatly does our Piety, our Zeal, our Self-Government, our single and social Virtues, and our universal Holiness fall short of those Degrees to which some of those *Jewish* Saints attained? Which of us can compare with the first of their Leaders, *Moses*, the Servant of God, in an unwearied Attendance on the Commands of his Lord, in opposition to all the Threatnings of the King of *Egypt* and the Murmurings of his own People *Israel*? Which of us would have shown such Meekness in bearing so many Indignities and Affronts from an ungrateful Race of Men, whom he had rescued from Brick-kilns and Task-masters and cruel Bondage? Which of us follow God so fully as *Caleb* and *Joshua* did, and could bear such an undaunted Testimony to the Truth of his Word, and

the Excellency of the promised Blessings, in opposition to the Clamours of a whole Nation, and the Danger of being stoned upon the Spot? How few are there in the present Age of Christians who are so well acquainted with the Efficacy and Success of Prayer as *Hannah* the Mother of *Samuel*, who poured out her Petitions before God, and left her Cares and her Burdens there, and went away *and was no more sad*? When shall any of us arise to the blessed experiences of *David*? When shall we live so much by Faith as he did, and triumph over all our Fears even in the midst of Enemies, Dangers and Distresses? When shall we arrive at such a humble holy Intimacy with God, as to walk with him all the Day long, and communicate with him all our Concerns, our Comforts, our Dangers and our Difficulties, and be able to rejoice in Hope as he did? How far are the Ways of his Faith and Love above ours, like the Way of an Eagle in the Air, too high and too hard for us? When shall our Zeal for the House of God carry us to such a pious Solicitude about it as his did? And when shall we feel such longing Desires and insatiable Thirstings after the Presence of God in holy Ordinances as he found? Which of us can say with the humble Spirit of *Micah*, *I will bear the Indignation of the Lord because I have sinned against him, 'till he arise and*

and plead my Cause? Or where is the Christian that can assume the Words of *Habakkuk* with the same Spirit of Faith, *Tho' there be no Fruit in the Field, nor Herds in the Stall, yet will I rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of my Salvation?* But it is Time to proceed to some other Characters which belong to us, and wherein we enjoy Advantages for Holiness superior to others; for 'tis a most evident and heavy Reproach upon us, that either *Jews* or *Heathens* should exceed us in any Instances of the religious or civil Life.

II. *We are Protestants, and not Papists*; and what Progress have we made in devout Religion and in real Piety beyond what some of the poor deluded People have done under the Power of *Papish* Darkeness, Superstition and Tyranny, notwithstanding our transcendent Advantages?

We are not with-held from the pure and perfect Instructions of the Word of God in our own Language, nor imposed upon by the Traditions of Men as the *Papists* are, who are generally forbid to keep Bibles in their own Custody in most of the *Papish* Nations, nor are they suffered to acquaint themselves with the Scriptures in their Mother-Tongue. We can see the Doctrines with our own Eyes which we are required to believe; we can read the Duties which we are commanded to practise; we can

learn the whole Counſel of God for our Salvation, and be inſtructed in all the Articles of Faith and Manners from the Word of God it ſelf. We are not deprived of this Key of Knowledge that leads us into the Treasures of Heaven and Eternity: We have the Bible in our Hands, we read it in our Families, 'tis open before us in our Retirements: How diligently ſhould we ſearch and inquire into every Truth and Duty that is propoſed to us, as the noble *Bereans* did, *Acts* xvii. 11? With what Zeal and Fervency ſhould we praſtiſe every divine Appointment, when the Obligations come upon our Conſciences more immediately from the Word of God? And how careful ſhould we be to worſhip God more exactly according to his own Appointments, ſince we have his own Word to inſtruct us?

How great and unſpeakable are our Advantages beyond thoſe who dwell under *Popiſh* Governments? Alas for thoſe poor benighted and imprifoned Creatures, held in the Chains of Darkneſs! How wretchedly are their Conſciences governed by blind Leaders, and they are not ſuffered to believe any thing but what the Church teaches them, *i. e.* the Priests, who are made the Directors of their Faith and Practice? Their Belief is founded on the Word of poor fallible Men, and ſometimes of wicked and deceitful Men too, inſtead of the Dic-

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tates of Heaven and the Words of the true and living God. They must believe nothing contrary to what the Church believes, tho' it be never so plainly written in Scripture; for if the Church has determined against the plainest Doctrines of the Bible, they must be construed to another Sense, according as the Church from Time to Time shall please to interpret the Word of God. What a Wonder is it if any of these miserable Mortals under such wretched Disadvantages should attain to the Practice of true Religion and the Faith and Holiness of the Gospel? But how much more shameful would it be to us, if any of them under these Disadvantages should be found to exceed and out-shine our Character and our Practice?

We are not taught to repeat our Prayers like Parrots in an unknown Tongue. Oh, what a Mockery of Heaven is this! What an high Affront to God and to the Reason of Man, to chatter over Words and Syllables before the God of Heaven, and to address him about the important Things of Grace and Salvation and eternal Life, and yet know nothing of our Wants or our Petitions! How serious, how fervent, how spiritual should our Devotion be, in comparison of theirs who are taught to pronounce a little Gibberish in *Latin* instead of serious Devotion? Whenever I read of any

Instances of religious and devout *Papists*, and especially if they are Persons of the lower Rank of Life, who have not the Advantages of the Men of Learning among them; and when I reflect to what Heights here and there one of them have risen in the spiritual Parts of Religion, I blush and am ashamed of my self, who enjoy so much superior Advantages, and sink so far below them in these divine Exercises.

We are not brought up in the Superstitions and Idolatries of the Church of *Rome*; we are not taught to worship Saints and Angels, nor required to bow down before a Piece of Bread in the Hand of a Priest, nor to pay religious Honours to Images of Wood and Stone, of Gold and Silver; we are not taught to address our selves to departed Saints and Angels for Mediators, to apply to the Virgin Mother instead of *Christ* her Son, nor to address the Apostles instead of their Master: We are directed only to the one Mediator, *Christ* the Son of God, who is All-sufficient, to reconcile us to God, and to make our Persons and our Prayers acceptable before the Throne; whereas the Disciples of the Pope distribute the Care of their best Interests amongst many Mediators, and recommend themselves to the Protection of many Saints and Saviours. Well, let us enquire then, are our Hearts united in the Faith and Love of *Jesus*,

us, the only Mediator, more than theirs? Are we better acquainted with *Jesus* the Son of God, to whom we have committed all our immortal Concerns, since our Thoughts and Hopes, our Wishes and Prayers, are not divided amongst many Intercessors? Do we pay more honour to *Jesus* our only Saviour than they do, who have so many Objects of their Trust and Worship to divide their Hearts and Devotions into slender Streams?

What shall I say for our own Excuse, if I should find some *Papists* exceeding us in their Love to God, in their Devotion to *Christ*, and in their Benevolence to Men? I believe indeed their Number is but small, but methinks 'tis a shame and reproach to us under our superior Advantages, if there should be found any of that corrupt and superstitious Church practising the *Christian* Religion, in the substantial Duties of it, better than we. When I read *Thomas à Kempis* resigning himself to his Lord and Saviour in such pious Language, " Give
 " me what thou wilt, and as much or little
 " as thou wilt, and when thou wilt. Deal
 " with me as thou knowest to be most pro-
 " per, and as may bring thee most Glory;
 " place me where thou pleasest, I'm in thy
 " Hand, turn me and toss me from Side to
 " Side: Behold thy Servant ready to be
 " and bear every Thing, for my Desire is

“ not to live to my self, but to thee: ”
 When I hear that excellent Man the Arch-
 bishop of *Cambray* lifting up his devout
 Heart thus to Heaven in the same Strains.
 of pious Resignation, “ I am for thee, O
 “ my God, against my self; none could
 “ have thus divided me from my self but
 “ thy Hand only. I leave my self in thy
 “ Hand, O my God, mould this Clay of
 “ mine, turn it up, and turn it down
 “ again, give it a Form, then break it and
 “ new mould it; ’tis intirely thine, it has
 “ nothing to reply; ’tis enough for me
 “ that this Being of mine serves thy Pur-
 “ poses and thy good Pleasure: Com-
 “ mand, appoint, forbid, what I shall do
 “ or what I shall not do: Elevated, aba-
 “ sed, comforted, suffering, I for ever
 “ adore thee, in sacrificing all my own
 “ Will to thine: ” When I hear this Lan-
 guage of a *Papist*, how am I ashamed of
 my own restiff and unpliant Heart? How
 much do I want of such an intire Resigned-
 ness to my Maker’s Will? With what Plea-
 sure do I read Monsieur *de Renty* in the
 Zeal of his inward Piety running counter
 to the Practices of his own Communion,
 and declaring that “ If we know not our
 “ own Devotion rather by the Mortifica-
 “ tion and Denial of our selves, than by
 “ the Multiplication of our devout Exer-
 “ cises, it is to be feared they will be rather
 “ Practices

“ Practices of Condemnation than of Sanctification: And yet we see the Work of *Jesus Christ* is almost reduced to this “ pass among the spiritual Persons of our “ Times.” But ’tis with a sacred Regret and Self-displicity I would look upon my self, while I review other Parts of his Life, where he took upon him all the mean and laborious Figures of Service to his Fellow-Creatures, and conformed himself to all Inconveniences for the good of his Neighbour; “ Methinks, says he, my Soul is “ all Charity, and I am not able to express “ with what Ardency and strange Expansion I find my Heart to be renewed in “ the divine Life of my new-born Saviour, “ burning all in Love towards Mankind.” How do I wish that I could repeat from my Heart the Words of that poor Servant Maid *Armelle Nicholas* in *France* in the last Century, “ God has not sent me into this “ World but to love him, and by his great “ Mercy I have loved him so much, that I “ cannot do it more in the Way of mortal “ Creatures; I must go to him, that I may “ love him in the Way of the Blessed.”

But before I dismiss this Head intirely, I would take notice of one Advantage more which the Protestants of *Great-Britain* enjoy toward the Practice of Charity and Love to their Fellow-Creatures, above and beyond what the *Papists* generally enjoy;

and yet even in this very Grace of Charity there have been Instances, as you see, wherein some of them exceed us. Let us remember that we are not educated in such a cruel and bloody Religion as the Papists, which Cruelty, tho' 'tis not practis'd by all of them, yet is taught by their Leaders: Their Religion encourages and inspires Men to murder and destroy their Fellow-Creatures for God's sake, as our Saviour himself foretold, *John* xvi. 2. They first call us Hereticks, and then condemn, torment and murder us, and blindly imagine *they are doing God service*. Oh bless the Name of the Lord for your Freedom from the Hand and Power of those whose Religion it is to do mischief in the Name of God, and to destroy those whom the Priests and the Inquisitors shall pronounce guilty of any Opinions which they are pleas'd to call *Heresy*. How often do they dress up a *Protestant* as it were in a Wolf's or Bear's Skin, and send out all their Dogs to devour him? Bless God with all the Powers of your Souls that you are not bred up in these barbarous Sentiments; nor should you think your self worthy of the Name of a *Protestant*, if you do not make the Bible the Rule of your Faith and Practice, and give others leave to find out their Duty also in that holy Book, according to their own best Sense of it, as well as your selves. But if
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you reproach and persecute the sincere Enquirers after the Truth, if you bite and devour those who differ from you in their religious Sentiments, who are humble and sincere Enquirers, *What do you more than others?* What are you better than the bloody *Papists*? And indeed how much worse are you than some few of them whose Souls abhor this cruel and antichristian Tyranny? This barbarous Temper of yours would run all the Lengths of Persecution even to Blood and Burning, if the Sword and the Fire were entrusted in your Hands. Shew therefore that you live in a Land of Protestant Principles and an Age of Liberty, and that the Spirit of the Gospel, the Spirit of Charity and Love dwells in you, by allowing to all Men the Freedom of their own Opinions, while they maintain the publick Peace: And as you profess to follow the divine Rule of Scripture, and the Dictates of your own Consciences with Honesty and sincere Zeal, believe charitably that your Fellow-Christians of a different Party may seek after the Truth with as much Zeal and with equal Sincerity, tho' they may not happen to see all Things in the same Light, nor embrace the same Principles. Let not your Accusations and Censures grieve their Spirits. Make it appear that you love your Neighbours, your Fellow Christians, and even the Enemies of
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your Person and your Religion better than the *Papists*, from whom you would distinguish your selves with Honour. But this shall suffice for the general Distinction between *Papist* and *Protestant*.

III. We are come in the next Place to consider our selves as *Protestant Dissenters*: Hereby we are distinguished from our Fellow Christians who belong to the *National Church of England*, in our Choice of different Modes of Worship and Ministrations of Holy Things. Permit me here to address you who are my Hearers under this Character, and inquire *What do you more than others?* You who attend upon the Worship of God in separate Assemblies, and sit under the Ministrations of those who have no Commission from the spiritual Guides of the Nation and Rulers of the Church; you who in this Respect are placed under such a sort of Providence as to be Imitators of the Disciples of *Christ* when he maintained separate Assemblies, and preached to the People without receiving any publick Authority, or so much as Countenance and Approbation from the Rulers of the national Church in his Day. Surely this is a Question of very awful Importance, and very necessary, while we continue our Separation, What higher Degrees of Piety or Virtue do we practise? What sublimer Advances in Religion are we arrived

rived at? Wherein are we better by all our Nonconformity than those who constantly conform to the Church of *England* as by Law established? What do all our Pretences to Separation mean, if we ascend to no superior Degrees of Goodness?

But before I enter into so nice a Subject as a Comparison between the *Advantages* and *Obligations* to strict Religion, which are found amongst the *Dissenters*, or amongst the Church of *England*, and their different Improvements under them, I desire to lay down this one Caution, *viz.* That nothing which I am going to speak should be construed to relate to any of those holy Souls who are of the first Rank in the School of *Christ*, who are the most pious and the most strictly religious, either among the Members of the Church of *England*, or among *Protestant Dissenters*; for I am not going to speak to or of these Persons, nor would I make Comparison between them: I would set them all before me as Examples for my humble Imitation and yours, and not as the Subjects of my Comparison. I am verily persuaded there are many Persons of both Communities who are dear to God, whose Names have an honourable Place in the Book of Life, who walk humbly and closely with God in all the known Duties of the Christian State, whose Sobriety in what relates to themselves,

selves, whose Justice and Charity in what relates to their Neighbours, and whose Devotion in what belongs to God, is glorious and exemplary indeed; who are taught and led by the same Spirit of Holiness, and are largely interested in the Favour of God the Father and his Son *Jesus Christ*. To those holy Souls on both sides I would only ask Leave to say, Go on in your illustrious Course of *Christianity*; rival each other in the Swiftneſs of your Race, in your pious and divine Progreſs toward Heaven; and may each of you run ſo far as to obtain one of the larger and fairer *Crowns of Righteouſneſs that ſhall never fade away*

Yet I can hardly with-hold my ſelf from pronouncing this one Word of Juſtice, That if any of the Members of the eſtabliſhed Church in this moſt pious Rank of Men are ſuperior to thoſe of our diſſenting Churches, I think they ought to have the Honour of this Superiority; and ſome Degree of Shame will belong to the beſt of us, if we are found inferior to them either in Virtue towards Men, or Piety towards God, becauſe of our ſuperior Advantages and Obligations.

Having laid down this Caution, I come to declare that the Perſons whom I would at this time compare together are the *common Profeſſors of Religion in the Church of England*, and the *common Profeſſors among*
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the Dissenters, the Bulk of the People both on the one Side and on the other; and I would fain excite you who hear me this Day, who are Professors of Religion, and call your selves *Protestant Dissenters*, to bethink your selves a little concerning the sensible Decay of real Goodness that is found amongst you, in order to awaken you to the warmest Zeal and utmost Endeavours to revive languishing and dying Religion. Give me Leave, while I have the Honour to be a Preacher amongst you in this Congregation, to address you in the Words of our Blessed Saviour, who was in his Day a divine Teacher to a Congregation meeting upon a Mountain, and in the Pathetick Language of Admonition and Love I would say to my Hearers as he did to his Disciples, *What do you more than others?* What is there of Duty to God or Man wherein you Separatists from the publick Establishment exceed the rest of the Nation? And to enforce this Exhortation, I shall here consider,

I. What *real Advantages* for Religion you enjoy above your Brethren of the Church of *England*, according to your own common Sense of Things.

II. What *superior Obligations* lie upon you by your particular Profession of Religion in a separate Way. And under each of these two general Heads I shall run thro' various Particulars.

SECTION

SECTION III.

*The Advantages of Protestant Dissenters in
Matters of Religion.*

THE first Question that offers it self to our Consideration is this, *What are the real and special Advantages for Improvement in Religion which you Protestant Dissenters enjoy, or suppose you enjoy, above your Brethren of the Church of England?*

And here I desire my Readers to observe, that I neither design to begin nor maintain any Controversy with my Brethren of the established Church in these Papers, which are written purely to revive practical Godliness amongst us, nor would I willingly give them any Offence. I confess indeed that it may not be improper in some Parts of our Ministrations to enter into the Merits of the Cause, and modestly to give our People an Account of the Reasons why we separate from the publick Worship of the Parish: And yet this we have almost universally declined for many Years out of Respect to the Church, nor is this my present Business or Intent in this Place; nor shall I stand to enumerate all our Differences, nor insist upon a Vindication of our Conduct in the several Particulars that go to make up the Grounds of
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Nonconformity. You may find them put together and well supported by other Writers, and particularly by Dr. Calamy in his three Volumes of *Moderate Nonconformity*; and the chief Heads of them, so far as they relate to the People, are well abridged in a very little Book called *Lay-Nonconformity Justify'd*, to which I refer my Readers who desire to take a more particular Notice of the Reasons of our Separation.

My only Design in this Place is to mention some of those *Advantages* which you *Protestant Dissenters* are generally supposed to enjoy above your Neighbours in the Affairs of Religion; and even these I shall cite and borrow from those Books which were written several Years ago, to make it appear that I design no Contention: And if I am necessitated to speak of some of the Differences that lie between us, the Reader will see that I represent them not in the Language of Dispute, nor pursue them any farther than to shew meer Matter of Fact, that I may thence derive more forcible and pungent Warnings and Reproofs to those of our own Communion, who are negligent of Piety and Virtue under all their supposed Advantages.

Advantage I. You are *not in so much Danger of taking up with the outward Forms of Religion, instead of the inward Power and more spiritual Part of it, as your Neighbours*

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140 *The Advantages of Dissenters*

may be, and that particularly in the two following Instances.

First, You are in no such Danger of *mistaking Baptism for inward and real Regeneration* *, as those who are educated in the established Church. You are not in the least tempted or encouraged in any of our Ministrations to suppose that your Souls are regenerated by the outward Ceremony of Baptism, or that you are really born again, and made new Creatures by being baptized with Water; to which unhappy and dangerous Mistake the Office of Baptism in the Church of *England* has been thought to give too much Countenance in the plain Sense of the Expressions, and without any sufficient Guard or Caution: And the Answer in the Catechism which Children are taught, does but too much confirm and establish them in this mistake: Read the second Question in the Church Catechism. *Quest. Who gave you this Name? Ans. My Godfathers and Godmothers in my Baptism, wherein I was made a Member of Christ, a Child of God, and an Inheritor of the Kingdom of Heaven.* And when their Parents hear it mentioned so expressly at the Baptism, that *the Child*, after it is baptized, *is regenerate and grafted into*

* See Dr. Calamy of Moderate-Nonconf. Vol. II. p. 131.

the Body of Christ's Church, and that *this Infant is regenerated with the Holy Spirit*, 'tis no wonder if they encourage Children to believe in a most literal Sense what their Catechism expressly teaches them, that they are all born again so as to become *the Children of God, Members of Christ, and Heirs of Heaven* by Baptism. I readily grant that many of the Ministers of the Church and the wiser Christians do know and believe that there is no such inward Grace and Salvation really communicated by baptismal Water: Yet almost all the Expressions in the Offices relating both to publick and private Baptism, and to the Baptism of those of riper Years, establish Persons in the same Mistake, and that as I hinted before without any manifest Caution to secure them from it.

But you, my Friends, who separate from the national Forms of Worship, are afraid of receiving this Doctrine, for you think it a Matter of dangerous Consequence both with regard to your selves and your Children. You have been taught and have learned that *Regeneration* is a great and holy Change wrought in the Powers of your Soul, your Understanding, Will and Affections, by the Spirit of God, whereby you come to see the evil and defiling Nature of Sin, and the dreadful Consequences of it, beyond whatever you saw before, whereby

whereby you learn the Excellency and Necessity of Holiness, whereby your sensual, vain and earthly Temper of Mind is altered, and your Heart set upon the Things of God and Heaven and Eternity instead of the perishing Enjoyments of this Life, whereby your sinful Nature is renewed by divine Grace, and you are brought to love God and fear him, to hope and trust in him, as he has manifested his Grace in *Christ Jesus* his Son, and whereby you are inclined to practise all the Duties of Piety toward God, and Justice and Charity towards your Fellow-Creatures. You are taught also, that tho' Baptism or washing with Water be a Sign or Figure or Emblem of this great and holy Change, this Purification, from the Defilement of Sin, and this Renovation of your Natures to Holiness, yet it is not the Thing it self, it is not the real spiritual Blessing; nor does this divine Blessing always attend it; and 'tis often administered to Persons who are never truly regenerate, who never have this divine Change or Purification passing upon them.

You lie therefore under the strongest Obligations to see to it, that you have better Evidences of Regeneration than your meer Baptism with Water: You are bound by your own Principles to seek this divine Change of your Heart, this spiritual and
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important Blessing with the utmost Care, Diligence, Devotion and Prayer. You are exhorted in the Ministry of the Word to labour with your own Hearts to convince them of the Evil of Sin, of the Beauty and Necessity of Holiness, of the Excellency of true Religion and the divine Life; to impress your Spirits by all proper Motives that they may repent of all Sin, that your Will may be turned away from it with Hatred, that your Love and Fear and Hope may be fixed upon better Objects than they are by Nature, even upon *God and Christ*, and Things spiritual and eternal: You are frequently called upon to strive and seek that your inward Disposition of Soul toward your Neighbour may be kind and just and faithful, such as God requires, that you may be delivered from the Power of Sin reigning in you, and that you may be reformed and made fit for the Business and Blessedness of Heaven, where nothing shall enter that defileth. You are exhorted and obliged to pray earnestly to God for the Assistance of his Spirit in this Divine Work, for unless we are *born of the Spirit* as well as *washed with Water* we cannot enter into the *Kingdom of God*, John iii. 3, 5, 6. Now has this been your solemn Care? Has this been your zealous Desire, and the Matter of your Labour with your own Heart in secret and of your fervent Prayer to God?

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Do you give your selves no rest till you find such a Change wrought in your Souls whereby you are become new Creatures, whereby you hate every thing that is offensive to God, and love and delight in the Practice of your Duty toward God and Man? What clear and convincing Evidences have you that you have entered into this new State, and obtained this divine Blessing? That instead of being a Child of Sin and Wrath (as you are by Nature) you are become a Child of Grace, and a Son or Daughter of the most High God?

Again, as you profess this Doctrine of inward Regeneration, and the Necessity of it in order to eternal Life, do you take due Care to impress the Sense of it on your Children? Do you let them know that, tho' they are baptized with Water, which is designed to be a Type or Figure of regenerating Grace, and of your Duty of Purification from Sin, yet this is not a sufficient Evidence of it, unless they find that their Hearts are inwardly changed? Do you inform them at proper Seasons, and by all gentle and convincing Means, that they are early Sinners before God, that their Hearts and Lives are corrupt and unholy, that washing with Water can never make them *Christians* any farther than a bare Profession goes, that they must be born again, *i. e.* they must become new Creatures, and have

have their Hearts and Inclinations and Desires and Passions altered from what they are in a sinful State, and formed unto Holiness if ever they would be saved? *John* iii 3.

What profit is it to your selves or your Children to avoid this unhappy Mistake of *inward Regeneration by Baptismal Water*, if you never concern your selves to seek after such a real divine Change of Heart and Life, in your selves or in them, as may make it appear that you are born again? What Advantage is it to your Off-spring to guard them from this Error, if you never take care to convince them of their corrupt Nature and sinful Inclinations? If you never teach them plainly that 'tis their Duty to be converted and turned from Sin to God, and beseech them earnestly to set about the Work of Conversion with all holy Diligence? What signifies it to keep them from this Mistake about Regeneration, if you never pray for them, nor teach them to pray for themselves, that God would renew their Hearts by his Spirit, that he would work this glorious and divine Change in them, that he would really translate them out of the Family of *Satan*, and make them his Sons and his Daughters? What! do you take Care to let them know that the outward washing of Baptism

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does

146 *The Advantages of Dissenters*

does not, cannot make them really the *Children of God, Members of Christ, and Heirs of the Kingdom of Heaven*, and yet have you no Sollicitude nor take pains to shew them how they may become the Children of God and Inheritors of his Kingdom? Do you let them grow up from the Day of their Baptism, wherein the Figure and Emblem of renewing Grace past upon them, 'till they are become Men and Women, without ever instructing and exciting them to seek after the Substance of this heavenly Blessing? Fathers, Mothers, elder Kindred, do you never concern your selves that your Children should obtain this divine Favour, and give good Evidence of the Work of the renewing Spirit of God in them, by a holy Behaviour and a heavenly Conversation? 'Tis but a poor Pretence for separating from the established Church, that you or your Children are in danger of being led into mistaken Opinions there, if you are not deeply solicitous that both they and you may avoid the Mischief as well as the Error, and that you practise as well as learn the Truth.

But leaving this Mistake about *Baptism*, there's another thing also wherein you Protestant Dissenters are free from the Danger of taking up with outward Forms instead of spiritual Blessings, and that is the *Ceremony of Confirmation* *. You have no such Rite performed among you as the *solemn Imposition of the*

* Dr. Calamy's Moder. Nonconf. Vol. II. p. 271.

the Hand of the Bishop on your Head, to become a Token or Sign of the Favour of God toward you, as is found in the Offices of the established Church. See the Office of Confirmation in the Common-Prayer. So soon as Children are come to a competent Age, and can say in their Mother-Tongue their Creed, and Lord's Prayer, and the ten Commandments, and also can answer to other Questions of this short Catechism, they shall be brought to the Bishop. And every one shall have a Godfather or a Godmother as a Witness of their Confirmation. Then the first Prayer begins. Almighty and everliving God, who hast vouchsafed to regenerate these thy Servants by Water and the Holy Ghost, and hast given unto them Forgiveness of all their Sins, &c. And in a following Collect the Bishop says — These thy Servants upon whom (after the Example of thy holy Apostles) we have now laid our Hands, to certify them (by this Sign) of thy Favour and gracious Goodness towards them. But you declare to the World that you cannot find that God has given to his Ministers any such Authority to certify Persons of the Favour and gracious Goodness of God toward them by any such Sign as this. But since you reject this Sign, are you not bound then to enquire what surer Signs you have of the Favour and Love of God to you? What better inward Tokens and Evidences have you that you are the Children of God and Partakers of his Favour?

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You

148 *The Advantages of Dissenters*

You complain that the publick Liturgy tempts Children to believe *they are regenerated or born again, and made Members of Christ and Children of God in Baptism*, which dangerous Opinion is also repeated in the Office of *Confirmation* * ; and you complain that they are further confirmed in this Mistake when the Bishop lays his Hand upon their Head to *certify them by this Sign of the Favour of God* : Are you careful then to teach your Children, and to enforce it upon their Consciences, that they must seek after better Signs of Regeneration and of the divine Favour, even the Graces of Faith and Love, and the Exercise of universal Holiness in Heart and Life ? What a vain Imagination is it, what an idle Pretence to guard against the Dangers of mistaking the Imposition of the Hand of a Man for a certain Sign of the Favour of God, unless you instruct your Household, what are the true and undoubted Signs of his Favour ? Unless you persuade them to all holy Diligence in securing and maintaining such Evidences of converting Grace and the Love of God, as God himself has prescribed,

such

* This Mistake is still more confirmed and established by the *Office of Burial*, wherein every baptized Person, except the Self-murderers and the Excommunicated, has his Body committed to the Dust in *sure and certain Hope of Resurrection to eternal Life*, and is called a *Dear Brother or Sister*, and Thanks are given for God's *taking their Souls to himself*, how wicked soever their Lives have been.

such as God will approve of, and such as will stand the Test in the Day of Judgment?

II. Another Advantage that you Protestant Dissenters have towards your Improvement in true Religion and in acceptable Service to God is, that *you are freed from the Inventions of Men, and from the Impositions and Incumbrances of human Ceremonies in divine Worship* *. There need be no Proof of the Imposition of such Rites in the established Church, since the Preface to the Common-Prayer Book confesses *they have been devised by Man, and yet it is thought good to reserve them still*. But you, my Friends, are required to practise nothing in the Worship of God but what you take to be his own pure Institutions.

It has pleased God in his Providence, and it hath pleased our late and present Rulers in their great Goodness and Justice, to give you Freedom from these human Appointments, and to permit you to worship God in a Way more agreeable to his own Word and to your own Consciences: The Question of my Text then returns upon you, What are you better than they who submit to them, *what do you more than they?* Do you never content your selves with meer

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Forms

* See Dr. Calamy's Introduction to his second Vol. of Moder. Nonconf.

150 *The Advantages of Dissenters*

Forms of Godliness? Are you more spiritual in the Service of your Creator, and more careful to practise every Appointment of God, since you are disengaged from the Appointments of Men? Are your Spirits more warmly engaged in heavenly Things? Are you more zealous in your Devotion? Have you the Fear of God more constantly before your Eyes, and the Faith of our Lord *Jesus Christ* working more powerfully in your Hearts? Say, my Friends, while your outward Worship is more uncorrupted with a Mixture of human Forms, have you more of the divine Power and inward Life of Religion? And while you make the Bible the only and the perfect Rule of your Faith and Practice, are you more careful to observe all the Duties of Christianity which the Bible recommends than those who join the additional Inventions of Men with them in their religious Performances?

Alas! what will all your Pretences to greater Purity in the outward Forms of Worship avail you, if you are not more pure and more advanced in the spiritual Parts of Piety and Religion than your Neighbours? You will give Occasion to others severely to upbraid you, and that with some Appearance of Reason too, that you really stand in need of these outward Forms to assist you; that you want these
Rites

Rites and Ceremonies to stir up your dull Minds to the Remembrance of your Duty to God by their notable and spiritual Signification, which is the very Reason given for the Use and Continuance of them in the Preface to the *Common-Prayer*. Unless you are more religious and holy without these Forms than they are with them, they will fling your Pretence of *Separation for the sake of greater Purity* back upon your Faces with huge and deserved Reproaches.

“ What! are you the Persons who profess
 “ to cleave only to the pure Ordinances of
 “ God’s Appointment? Do you abandon
 “ and renounce our Ceremonious outward
 “ Forms as though they were carnal, un-
 “ clean and unholy, and yet shamefully
 “ neglect the inward, the spiritual and
 “ more necessary Parts of true Religion and
 “ Godliness? ” And how will you be
 able to answer such sharp and righteous
 Rebukes?

Shall I be permitted to mention two or three of these Ceremonies upon this Occasion, that I may awaken and excite you thereby to various Duties, and warn you against a Neglect of them.

1. You have not the divine Ordinance of *Baptism* incumbered amongst you with the human Addition of the Sign of the Cross to be made on the Forehead of the

152 *The Advantages of Dissenters.*

Child *, which is appointed by the Church as a *Token that hereafter he shall not be ashamed to confess the Faith of Christ crucified, and manfully to fight under his Banner against Sin, the World, and the Devil.* You renounce this Ceremony of the Cross; but do you remember a crucified Saviour, and let him dwell upon your Thoughts more than they do who make use of it? Are you more courageous and manful in the Profession of the Gospel in a dangerous Hour? Are you less ashamed to confess the *Faith of Christ crucified* in the Company of Infidels, or *manfully to fight under his Banner against Sin, the World, and the Devil*, than they? Do you teach your Children these Duties, and shew the Necessity of Practising them without the Assistance of this Figure made on their Foreheads? Shall we not give our Brethren of the established Church Occasion to charge us with Folly or Hypocrisy for being so much offended at such a Sign of the Cross, which they use to put themselves and their Children in mind of *Christ crucified*, if they see us negligent of the Name, the Doctrines, and the Honours of a crucified Saviour? Let us make it appear then to the World that we are faithful Soldiers of *Jesus Christ* without this

* See Dr. Calamy of Moder. Nonconf. Vol. II. p. 179. Vol. III. p. 67. Lay Nonconf. justified, p. 29.

this human Badge of Distinction; shew your Neighbours that you can fight with Courage and Glory under his Banner against Sin and *Satan*, without having passed under the Figure of the Cross in Baptism, and that you stand in no need of the additional Ceremonies of Men to put you or your Children in mind of your Duties to the Son of God.

2. You are not required to provide God-fathers and Godmothers for your Children in Baptism, who are called *Sureties* *, by which the Infant professes to renounce the Devil and all his Works, and to believe God's holy Word and keep his Commandments. You are ready to imagine that the Promises of these Sureties arise so high as to give Parents too much Indulgence and Excuse for their own personal Neglect of the Instruction of the Child, especially when the Parent himself is not permitted to become a Surety.

You who separate from the Church of *England* do not think it needful or proper to have any *Sponsors*, nor do you provide any such Sureties for your Children, and thereby you appear to lay your selves under a strong and publick Obligation to educate them your selves in the Fear of God and in the Faith of *Christ*. Now the Ques-

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* See Dr. *Calamy* of Moder. Nonconf. Vol. II. p. 147, 169. Vol. III. p. 66. Lay Nonconf. justified, p. 27.

154 *The Advantages of Dissenters*

tion address'd to your Consciences is this,
Do you take more Care in the pious and
 Christian Education of your Off-spring
 than your Brethren or Neighbours of the
 Parish, who have provided Sureties to sup-
 ply their own Absence or Defect? Are you
 more diligent and more sollicitous to see
 your Children brought up in the Know-
 ledge of the true God, and in Acquain-
 tance with *Christ Jesus* the only Saviour?
 Are you more careful to inform them be-
 times of their Duties to God and their Du-
 ties to Men, and to train them up in all
 the necessary and important Doctrines and
 Practices of the true Religion? Surely your
 Brethren of the established Church will
 have abundant Reason to reprove and cen-
 sure you, who renounce the Aid of Sure-
 ties in the Education of your Children,
 and yet take so little Care of them your-
 selves. "O cruel and profane Parents!
 "where is your Tendernefs? where your
 "Bowels of Affection? How strangely
 "and wickedly careless are you of the im-
 "mortal Interests of your own Off-spring,
 "and the Interest of God in them? Have
 "you not devoted them to God and
 "*Christ* in Baptism, and yet neither teach
 "them your selves the Way to the Favour
 "of God by *Jesus Christ*, nor make any
 "Provision for your Neighbours to do it
 "for you?" You will be condemned by
 the

the World and the Church, you will be condemned by all your Neighbours and by your own Children, and you will be terribly condemned by your own Consciences, and by *Jesus* the Judge of Mankind, if you neglect this sacred Work, or do it in so formal and trifling a Manner as can have little or no Effect on the Hearts and Consciences of your Off-spring.

3. Shall I take one Step farther, and mention the Appointment of *kneeling at the Lord's Supper* *, which is acknowledged to be an human Institution, and not required in Scripture. It must be granted that the Church of *England*, by a solemn Caution, declares plainly *that no Adoration of the Elements is intended thereby*; nor do I enter here into the Enquiry how far it is lawful or convenient, but it is certain that it offends the Consciences of many of you, who cannot think that any other Posture is proper for the receiving of this Sacrament, than that of eating and drinking at a Table, in which Posture it was instituted. But the Question that my Text would address to your Consciences on this Occasion, is this; Are you as humble and as devout at this sacred Solemnity, while you neglect this outward Sign of Humility, as your Brethren

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* Dr. *Calamy* of *Moder. Nonconf.* Vol. II. p. 197. and Vol. III. p. 68. Lay *Nonconf.* justified. p. 31.

156 *The Advantages of Dissenters*

threen are who practise it? Are you more penitent and self-abased under a Sense of your Sins, and more thankful for the condescending Love of *Jesus* the Son of God, who came and died to save you? Have you as great a Reverence for the Blood of *Christ*, which was shed for the Remission of Sins, and do you adore God and the Saviour with a more contrite Spirit and a warmer Zeal? Do you partake of these sacred Emblems of the Body and Blood of *Christ* with a most profound Respect to him? Otherwise you will give your Neighbours just Reason to reprove and censure you, that you neglect at once the outward Forms and the inward Duty; that you renounce the Posture of humble Worship and forget the spiritual Practice of it; that you have need to be rouzed from your Seats at the Table of the Lord, and be brought down upon your knees to confess your want of Devotion and Honour to the Son of God, and your want of Humility and religious Gratitude for his inestimable Benefits. In vain you pretend Scruples about the Posture of your Knees, if your Hearts are not found in a very devout and adoring Frame at so solemn a Season.

But give me Leave to make a further Enquiry. While some of you profess to be displeased with *kneeling at the Lord's Supper*, because

because it is performing such an Institution of *Christ* in a Gesture which he has not instituted, do you think you are less criminal who never perform this Duty at all, which our Lord and Saviour has so expressly instituted and commanded? Is this a proper way to shew your Reverence for the Body and Blood of *Christ*, to abstain intirely from the appointed Emblems and Tokens of them? Will you dare to tell *Jesus* the Lord, upon his Throne of Judgment, that you were offended with your Brethren, who kneeled down to worship him while they eat his Bread and drank his Wine, and partook of the Feast to which he has called them; and yet that you dared from Year to Year, for twenty or thirty Years together, to neglect this sacred Feast intirely, and turn your backs upon this gracious Ordinance? Can you imagine that you please him better by utterly refusing the Remembrance of the Death of *Christ* at his Supper, than they do who remember him at his Table in a mistaken Posture? Can you ever persuade your own Consciences, that you who never comply with the tenderest Pledges and Memorials of his Love, and reject his dying Commandment, are better Christians than they who practise this sacred Duty with a mistaken Gesture of humble Worship, while they are called and invited to sit around this Table?

Examine

158 *The Advantages of Dissenters*

Examine yourselves, my Friends, you that have never yet sealed a Covenant with God the Father by the Blood of *Christ* at his Table, what are the true Reasons of this Neglect? Is it not Sloth and Negligence in spiritual Things? Is it not a very shameful Indolence about Matters of religious Importance? Is it not an Unwillingness to make open Profession of the Cross of *Christ*, and to bind yourselves more publickly to all the Practices of strict Christianity and Godliness? Converse over these Enquiries with your own Hearts, and let your own Consciences determine, whether you are not vastly more to blame in neglecting to honour *Christ* in such an Ordinance, appointed with his dying Breath, than your Brethren of the Church of *England*, who conscientiously and devoutly practise this Command of *Christ*, tho' 'tis in the Posture of Adoration instead of the Posture of Communion at a Feast; and let your own Reproof awaken and shame you out of your guilty Negligence.

I mention no more the Incumbrance of human Ceremonies, but to proceed immediately to the *third Advantage* for the Increase of Piety, which you suppose you enjoy amongst the Protestant Dissenters, and raise some serious Enquiries upon it.

Advantage III. You are not confined to a perpetual Repetition of set Forms of Prayer

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in your publick Worship *. This has been one Ground of your Disapprobation of the parochial Worship of the Nation. Some of your selves, and your Fathers before you, who have attended divine Service there, have complained much, that coldness and indifferency of Spirit and Formality are ready to be introduced into your Devotion by this Means ; and that your Hearts are apt to grow dull, negligent and drowsy, under this uniform and constant Rehearsal of the same returning Forms and Phrases, especially considering that the Minister is not suffered to omit any one appointed Line in the Book, tho' he thinks it never so improper ; nor is he permitted to add or insert one new Sentence in the midst of his *Collect*, tho' never so many devout Sentiments and Petitions should arise in his Mind while he is reading it, and tho' these Petitions appear to him never so suitable to the present Time and Place and Congregation.

God forbid that I should say or think that Forms of Prayer are sinful Things, or improper for our Assistance ! nor indeed am I so zealous against Forms, as to imagine that a precomposed Liturgy, in the main distinct Parts of Worship, Confession and
Petition,

* See Dr. *Calamy's* Moder. Nonconf. Vol. III. p. 100, 105. Lay Nonconf. justified, p. 19.

Petition, would be unlawful to be used. The *Directory of the Assembly of Divines at Westminster* comes pretty near to such a Design, still supposing that there be Liberty for the Minister to omit or add, to change and vary according to present Occasions, and that he have leave to express a warm and devout Thought which is upon his Heart, and that he is not constrained to forbid and suppress those pious Sentiments and Desires which may be hoped to be the Motions of the good Spirit of God in Prayer.

I never imagined that well-composed Forms of Prayer might not be used with such a Liberty, and assist the real Devotion of well-disposed Minds either at Home or at Church. It is my Opinion they may be so managed as to become a happy Means to promote true Religion in the Hearts even of wise and advanced Christians as well as Children and weaker Persons. I am verily persuaded that there are many holy Souls address the God of Heaven in a Variety of Prayers that are precomposed, and find spiritual Improvement thereby. There are many devout Minds who continually worship him in an acceptable Manner, even in these Forms of Words, and that not only in publick, but in their Families also. And yet I cannot help thinking with you, that this Method of Worship,
if

if there be a Confinement to the constant Repetition of one and the same Form, has naturally some Tendency to pass over the Ears without due Impressions on the Heart, and to leave the Worshipper under a Coldness and Indifferency of Spirit, which would be greatly relieved by a larger Variety of Sentiments and Expressions in the publick Worship of every Lord's Day.

May I be permitted here to cite a few Lines from the ingenious Writings of the late Marquis of *Halifax*, who being a Courtier in the Reigns of the two Brothers, King *Charles* and *James* II. can never lie under the Suspicion of being a Dissenter. This noble Writer, in a little Book under a borrowed Character, gives his own Sentiments of Things. He tells us, that " he
" is far from relishing the impertinent
" Wandrings of those who pour out long
" Prayers upon the Congregation, and all
" from their own Stock, too often a barren
" Soil, which produces Weeds instead
" of Flowers, and by this means they expose
" Religion it self rather than promote
" Mens Devotion : On the other side,
" there may be too great a Restraint put
" upon Men whom God and Nature have
" distinguished from their Fellow-Labourers,
" by blessing them with a happier Talent,
" and by giving them not only good
" Sense, but a powerful Utterance too ;
" this

162 *The Advantages of Dissenters*

“ this has enabled them to gush out upon
 “ the attentive Auditory with a mighty
 “ Stream of devout and unaffected Elo-
 “ quence. When a Man so qualified, en-
 “ dued with Learning too, and above all
 “ adorned with a good Life, breaks out
 “ into a warm and well delivered Prayer
 “ before his Sermon, it has the Appear-
 “ ance of a divine Rapture ; he raises and
 “ leads the Hearts of the Assembly in
 “ another Manner than the most compo-
 “ sed or best studied Form of set Words
 “ can ever do ; and the *Pray we's*, who
 “ serve up all their Sermons with the same
 “ garnishing, would look like so many
 “ Statues, or Men of Straw in the Pulpit,
 “ compared with those who speak with
 “ such a powerful Zeal, that Men are tempt-
 “ ed at the moment to believe Heaven it
 “ self has dictated their Words to them. ”

But I recall my self from running out too
 largely on this Point. My present Business
 is to enquire of you, my Friends, how stands
 the Case with your Spirits in publick Wor-
 ship, who are not confined to the weekly
 Rehearsal of these religious Forms ? *What*
do you more than others ? Are you more
 lively in the freer Addresses of your Souls
 to Heaven without a Confinement to set
 Words and Phrases ? Are your Spirits more
 humble, and your devotional Thoughts in
 warmer Exercise, while you are adoring the
 great

great and blessed God in a larger Variety of Language? Are your Hearts more deeply affected with a Sense of Sin in your free Confessions? Are you more fervent while you join in your Petitions for pardoning Mercy, for sanctifying Grace, for Deliverance from Temptations, and Assistance to perform Duty? Are your Spirits more importunate in pleading at the Throne of Grace? Is your Love and Gratitude more exalted in our more unconfined Methods of Thanksgiving and Praise? Does your Zeal and Joy rise higher in blessing the Name of the Lord your God and *Jesus* your Saviour? In a word, are you more devout and spiritual in the House of Prayer? Are you more free from that Dulness, that Indifference, that Formality which you complain of, and which you profess to fear under the use of a constant Form? If you content your selves with cold and lazy Devotions, with thoughtless or wandering Hearts in the Place of Worship, under those free Ministrations which you desire for your greater Advantage, your Complaints and Pretences against the established Forms of the Nation will hardly be excused from the Charge of vain and insincere; and you may expect a severe Reproof from the Judgment-seat of *Christ*. “Where
“are all your Pretences to the Life and
“Power and Spirit of Devotion, while
“you

164 *The Advantages of Dissenters*

“ you have not been restrained to the
 “ Use of a single Form? What have you
 “ done in the House of Prayer more
 “ than those who have not enjoyed your
 “ Advantages?”

Advantage IV. You not only worship God in your own chosen Way, but *you have the Choice of your own Ministers* also. You join your selves to what worshipping Congregation you please, whether it be within the Bounds of your own Parish or no; and you are not confined to sit under such Teachers as some rich Patron shall chuse and provide for you *: And 'tis a melancholy Thought, that too often a Country Parish is furnished with a Preacher whom the Patron chuses as the fittest Companion for himself, and whose Character in the main is not much superior to that of the Patron either in the Love of Learning, in Piety or Virtue.

And let it be number'd among your Advantages for Edification also, that however difficult it may be for a Parish to get rid of an ill Minister, yet your Congregations have Power to dismiss your Ministers, if they prove immoral and scandalous, if they grow intolerably imperious and assuming, or shamefully contentious; if they
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* See Moderate Nonconf. Vol. III. p. 61, 154.
 Lay Nonconform. justified, p. 5.

become grossly negligent of the great Work of their Ministry' and continue so after all due Admonition, if they be known to fall into gross and dangerous Errors, and will publish them in opposition to the common Sense and Sentiments of the People ; and such Dismissions are sometimes practised among you, where just Occasions have risen, and that without long and vexatious Processes at Law : so that you are not obliged to sit under the Preaching of Persons of a blemished Character, or who are unqualified for the sacred Work, or who are utterly unprofitable to your Edification.

Well then, my Friends, if you have not such publick Ministrations as edify and profit your Souls, 'tis in a great measure your own Fault, since you sit under such a Ministry as you chuse. One would presume that you hear their Messages of holy Things with Satisfaction and Delight. But while you enjoy this Privilege, enquire of your own Consciences, *What have you profited more than others ?* Do your Souls find a greater Increase in Knowledge, and in the Power of Godliness ? Do you treasure up more of their Words in your Heart, and receive them with Faith and Love so far as they are agreeable to the Word of God ? Do you feed and live upon the Sermons you hear ? Do you attend on their Messages
of

of Truth or Duty with holy Joy, and make them the Food and Support of your Spirits ? If you chuse the Person, and are pleased with the Performances of him who ministers, 'tis a very considerable Step toward profiting by his Ministry. The Word methinks should glide more easily into the Heart, and have a powerful Sway and Influence on the Conscience, when 'tis received from the Man we love to hear : And indeed what sort of Sermons can you ever hope to profit by, if not by the Preaching of those whom your selves have chosen ? You have plainly this Advantage above your Neighbours, but is your Improvement greater than theirs ?

But if we enter into Particulars on this Subject, we shall find perhaps that your Advantages are more considerable even in your own Esteem, arising from the Character and Qualifications of the Ministers whose Labours you chuse to attend, and from the Way and Manner of their Preaching *.

It

* Let it be observed here, that different Nations and Ages, and Parties of Christians, have their peculiar Way and Manner in Preaching. The primitive Fathers and the Moderns have very different Fashions. The *Germans* and *French*, the *English* and *Scots*, the *Cocceians* and *Voetians* among the *Dutch*, the *Arminians* and *Calvinists*, the ancient *Puritans* and the zealous *Churchmen* of that Day, the present *Conformists* and the *Non-conformists*.

It was the general Desire of your Fathers, and it is still for the most part your Desire and Endeavour to sit under such a Ministry, as not only preaches the Law, to convince you of Sin and to direct you to the several Duties you owe to God and Man, *but which leads you into a Sense of your Degeneracy and Ruin by the Fall of Adam, and your Impotence to restore your selves, and gives you a large Acquaintance with the Methods of divine Grace in the Gospel, and the Benefits of the new Covenant*, recovering you from your guilty and sinful State by the Sacrifice and Death of *Christ*, and enabling you by his Spirit to perform the several Duties prescribed. You desire such Preachers as display the various Glories of *Christ* in his sacred Offices of a Mediator and High-Priest, a King and a Judge, and lead you to practise all the divine, social and personal Virtues, by Evangelical Motives and Evangelical Assistances, as well as by the Principles and Obligations of the Light of Nature, and who insist frequently upon the peculiar Themes of Christianity and divine Revelation *.

Now

conformists, have their different Manners partly in composing and partly in delivering their Sermons: Nor is it strange that the *Protestant Dissenters* should think the Way practised among them preferable to any other, and of more Advantage toward their Salvation.

* See Lay Nonconf. justified, p. 16, 17.

168 *The Advantages of Dissenters*

Now permit me to make the Enquiry in my Text. Those of you who do sit under such Ministrations as you desire in this respect, *What do you more than others?* Are your Souls more Evangelical, more truly Christian than your Neighbours? Have you more of the Temper and Spirit of the Gospel wrought into your very Hearts and inward Powers? Do you love *Christ Jesus* the Lord, and live upon him by daily Faith and Dependance, more than they who do not hear of him so often as you? Are you brought nearer to the Throne of God in more frequent and delightful Performance of the Duty of Prayer, and in more humble, holy and intimate Converse with God; you who hear so much of *Jesus Christ*, the High-Priest, of Atonement and Intercession, and of his Readiness to bring you into the Favour and Presence of God? Do you hate Sin more than your Neighbours, since you are so often taught what it cost the Son of God to redeem you from it? Is the Frame of your Spirit and the Course of your Life more agreeable to the divine Pattern that the Holy *Jesus* has set you, and to the strict Rules of his Religion? You who are taught more of the Ruin and Impotence of Nature, and the Necessity of divine Grace, are you more self-abased under a Sense of your Degeneracy and Weakness, and do you seek the
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Assistances of the Spirit of God with more Importunity and holy Fervours of Devotion, that he may subdue Sin, and raise you to higher Degrees of Holiness? What Use do you make of the spiritual and evangelical Preaching which you profess to attend upon, if the great Ends of the Gospel of *Christ* are not attained in and upon you, if you do not honour him more than others, if you are not made more like him, more holy and blameless before him?

Examine your selves strictly, my Friends, are you so watchful, so exact in all the Virtues of Temperance, Sobriety, Justice, Truth, Faithfulness, Charity, Meekness, Forbearance, Forgiveness, and all Instances of Brotherly Love, as becomes those that profess much Acquaintance with the blessed *Jesus*, whose Soul was divine Truth and Love, and whose Life was all Virtue and Piety, and Goodness in Perfection? Do you never give Occasion to your Neighbours to reproach your selves and your Ministers together, that you practise so little Morality because you hear so little of it preached? Have you not by this means exposed the Preaching of the Name of *Christ* to Scandal, and the glorious Doctrines of the Gospel to Infamy, as tho' they indulged the Hearers of them in licentious Practices?

170 *The Advantages of Dissenters*

Your own Consciences must bear witness that we have endeavoured to declare *amongst you the whole Counsel of God*, and neither kept back the Doctrines nor the Duties which our Lord has sent us to publish to Men: We have taught you, that the great Design of all the glorious Transactions of God and *Christ* for your Salvation, is, *that you might be holy and without Blame before him in Love*, Eph. i. 3, 4. We have assured you, that the *Grace of God which brings Salvation to Men, teaches you to deny all Ungodliness and Worldly Lusts, and to live soberly, righteously and religiously*, and if you are *purchased to be a peculiar People to God by the Blood of his Son*, it is, *that you might be zealous of good Works*, Tit. ii, 11, 12, 14. Have you ever felt the Influence of the dying Love and the redeeming Blood of *Christ*, softening and melting your Hearts into a sincere Sorrow for Sin and holy Desires to love God, and be made like him? Has the Gospel (which you yourselves profess to be so much a better Spring of Holiness than natural Religion can furnish you with) has this Gospel had its proper and powerful and sanctifying Effects on your Hearts and on your Lives? Do you behave with so much more Honour, Justice and Goodness amongst Men, and with so much more Piety toward God as your Advantage requires? You who have so often
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the great and evangelical Motives of the Life and Love, the Example, the Sacrifice and the Death of *Christ* set before you in Publick Worship, has your Love to God and Man grown fervent in proportion to such Persuasives? How dreadful will your Case be, if after all Pretences to an evangelical Ministry you disgrace the Gospel of *Christ* in the Ministrations of it, by intemperate, immoral or irreligious Lives? If you have better Helps to Holiness and Virtue, according to your own Sentiments, than others enjoy, let your Consciences never be satisfied till your Heart and Life be reformed and purified in proportion to your profess'd Advantages, lest you *make Christ the Minister of Sin*, and lest the Preachers of a crucified *Christ* be exposed by your Means as the Licensers of Unrighteousness.

Again, you profess to chuse such a Ministry as not only informs the Mind in general of the Truths and Duties of Christianity, but *makes a particular Search and Enquiry into Souls and Consciences, and teaches the Hearers by Evidences and Characters drawn from the Word of God to examine and judge of themselves and their own State and Case*: you like such Preaching best as enters into the various Turnings of the Heart of Man, and unfolds and discovers the subtle Workings of Sin in the Soul,

and its manifold Disguises to conceal it self from *the Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God*. You expect to hear your Ministers address themselves distinctly to Persons of various Characters ; to direct their discourse sometimes to the indolent and thoughtless Sinner, or the conceited and presumptuous Soul, in order to rouse them out of their Security, and to thunder upon the sleepy Consciences of Men who speak a false Peace to themselves, and awaken them to a Sight of their Mistake, and their infinite Peril. You expect your Ministers would sometimes enter into the particular Case of convinced and awakened Souls, and treat with them about their important and everlasting Interests, and put them upon most earnest Enquiries about the Way to be saved ; that we should assist them in their spiritual Conflicts amidst all their budding Hopes, and their blasting Fears, in all the pious and secret Jealousies of their own Hearts, their Doubts and Complaints, their holy Desires and trembling Tendencies toward God and *Christ*, and Salvation ; and that we should direct the doubtful Foot where to tread, and the doubtful Eye where to look for Peace and Pardon, for Light and Strength, for Holiness and eternal Life. You delight to hear your Preachers sometimes mention the Case of the Afflicted and the Tempted,

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who are engaged in a hard Combat with their spiritual Adversaries, with the Powers of Sin within them, and Temptation without them, and you wait to hear us give the feeble and the Oppressed some proper Advice and Encouragement. You expect we should at other Times take the Case of Backsliders in hand, and prepare a Word of Admonition and Reproof for those that decline from the good Degrees of Religion which once they professed and practised; that we should strengthen the feeble, the humble and the fearful Christian, and pass thro' the various Parts of spiritual Experience, and the several Scenes and Stages of the Christian Life. Surely this was the Fashion and Practice of our Fathers amongst the *Puritans and Protestant Dissenters* in their Ministry: I hope this is the present Mode of preaching amongst us, and I wish with all my Soul this Sort of Ministration, this Manner of *dividing the Word of God, and giving to each their Due*, may never grow out of fashion in our Places of Worship.

But my Business is to apply this Matter closely to your Consciences: Under all these Advantages (as you suppose) of experimental Preaching, do you live any better than your Neighbours? Have you learnt more of the Christian Life in the various

174 *The Advantages of Dissenters*

Parts of it than they have done? Are you more acquainted with the particular State and Case of your own Souls toward God? Have you traced out the Frame of your own Spirit, or are you more solicitous to find it? Can each of you tell where to rank your selves? Are you mere nominal Christians, or real Followers of *Christ*? Are you among the Secure and Presumptuous, or the Awakened and Convinced? Are you among the irresolute, the doubtful and wavering Christians, or among those who run the Race of Holiness with a Steadiness and Establishment of Soul? Are you daily growing in the Things of God, or do you belong to the Class of Backsliders in Heart and Ways? Have you observed the Directions that have been given to Persons under these different Characters? Have you made such a Proficiency in Religion hereby, as to answer the Designs of those Ministrations and Labours in the Pulpit under which you have placed your selves? 'Tis in vain for you to pretend to have enjoyed such a Manner of Preaching as is most suited to bring Souls onward from a State of Sin and Nature to a State of Grace and advancing toward Glory, if you your selves remain still in a State of Sin, and are Strangers to divine Grace, or if you have never applied the distinguishing Evidences

dences of formal Professors and sincere Converts, so as to learn where to rank your selves.

Yet once more, give me leave to put you in mind, that you generally profess to desire such a Ministry as not only instructs the Head, but *strikes the Heart in a powerful and affecting Manner*; you delight to hear your Ministers in the Application of their Discourses speak with Life and Zeal, like Messengers who are sent from God to Sinners on an Errand of Everlasting Importance: You love to hear them address the Consciences of their Auditory in such a serious, a penetrating, and a persuasive Style and Manner as becomes Persons who are in good earnest, who feel the Power of the Words which they speak, and who are resolved if possible to reach the Hearts of the Assembly, and to save the Souls of Men from Hell by the concurrent Influences of the Grace of God.

But then, my Friends, if you chuse such a Ministry, and suppose that you enjoy any such Advantages, *what have you profited thereby more than others?* Do you frequent Places of Worship where there are such awakening, fervent and persuasive Ministrations, and why are you not more remarkably reformed, and more eminently religious? Why are you not more effectually convinced of the Evil of Sin and the

176 *The Advantages of Dissenters*

Danger of eternal Wretchedness under the Wrath of God? Why are you not all more powerfully persuaded to break off your Sins by Repentance, to cry out *what shall I do to be saved?* to fly for Refuge to the only Hope, to receive *Jesus* the Saviour in all his blessed Offices, to resign your Souls to his Care and Grace and Government, and devote your selves to him for ever? Why are you so cold, so indifferent in the Practice of the Duties of Piety and Virtue, which are so warmly recommended to you? What! is all the Fervour of the Pulpit lost upon you? Do the Words die on your Ears, and never reach your Souls? Why are you so unaffected with the important and eternal Things of the invisible World, which are set before you in the Ministry with some Zeal and Affection? What will you say for your own Defence, when some of your Brethren and Neighbours of the established Church, who have sat all their Days under that which you suppose to be a less affecting Ministry, shall have their Hearts awakened and warmed with the great and awful Scenes of Religion more than you? How will you answer it to your final Judge, if he shall find their Souls have been drawn near to God, and engaged in the lively Exercises of Faith and Love and every Grace, and yet you your selves who profess to enjoy superior Advantages shall

shall be found cold Triflers and meer Formalists in Religion? A dreadful Sentence awaits such Sinners from the Tribunal whence there is no Appeal.

Thus I have finished the *fourth Advantage* which you who worship God in separate Assemblies profess to enjoy above your Brethren of the Church of *England*, viz. you chuse your own Ministers, and put your selves under the Preaching and the pastoral Care of such Persons as you your selves best approve and think most adapted to the Salvation of Souls.

V. Another Advantage which you who worship God in separate Assemblies are supposed to have above your Brethren of the Church of *England* is this, *that the Communion of your Churches is kept more pure and free from unworthy and scandalous Members, by the Exercise of proper Discipline*, in the Care that is taken about the Admission to the Lord's Table, and in excluding the Ignorant and the Vicious from your special Fellowship. When a Communicant in any of your Congregations grows vicious or prophane, and it appears so by evident Proof, he is at least privately admonished to abstain from the Holy Communion, or plainly forbid to attend on it: And in some of our Congregations he is more solemnly cast out of the Church, as unworthy to partake of so holy an Institution as the Table

178 *The Advantages of Dissenters*

of our blessed Lord : Nor is he received again 'till he hath professed serious Repentance, and hath behaved himself for some proper Space of Time as a Penitent and a Person thoroughly reformed. Now where such Discipline is maintained in Christian Congregations, this remarkable Advantage is obtained by it, that all vicious Practices are most evidently and powerfully discouraged by the Exclusion of Criminals from the Church. If such a Person be found among us, he is shunned *that he may be ashamed* : The pious Communicants *have no company with him* besides what is necessary and cannot be avoided. This is perfectly agreeable to the Directions of the Apostle. Some construe those Words of St. Paul into this Sense, in 2 *Thes.* iii. 16. *Now we command you in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ that you withdraw yourselves from every Brother which walketh disorderly* : But in 1 *Cor.* ix. 10, 11. the Sense is stronger and more evident ; *I wrote unto you in an Epistle not to keep company with Fornicators, &c. but now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any Man who is called a Brother be a Fornicator or covetous, or an Idolater, or a Railer, or a Drunkard, or an Extortioner, with such an one, no, not to eat.* Whether this *eating* refer to the religious Feast of the Lord's Supper, or whether to the common Entertainments of the Table,

Table, may perhaps be doubted by Interpreters ; but this Inference is certain, that if the Apostle forbids familiar Society with Persons of this Character at our common Repast, much more are we forbid to hold Communion in the sacred Feast with Persons of such a Character. Surely the Table of the Lord should be guarded and kept as pure as our own Tables. The Churches of *Christ* are and should be separate and distinguished from the World ; they should have as little chosen and voluntary Society as may be with the Wicked of the Earth, and especially in Holy Things, that they may keep up a more venerable Character and Reputation of the Gospel in the World, and of the Obligations that lie upon those that profess Christianity to be strictly religious : They are called to separate themselves from *every Defilement of Flesh and Spirit, to come out from among the Wicked and Prophane, that they may be a peculiar People to the Lord.*

'Tis true, this cannot be practised universally and perfectly in any visible Churches of *Christ* here on Earth, because we are bound to judge by the sensible Appearances of Things : And those who have the visible Marks of *Christianity* in the Knowledge and Profession of the Faith of *Christ*, and whose Conversation in the World is sober and pious to all outward

Appearance, may claim a Place in any Christian Church and in the peculiar Rites and Ordinances of the Gospel : And upon this account there may be some secret Sinners who make their way into our separate Congregations, and join with us in the most solemn Ordinances, tho' they are not really worthy of any Room or Place in the House of God : Yet common Swearers and common Drunkards, publickly vicious, riotous and unclean Persons, and Men of scandalous Life, are never received amongst us to the holy Fellowship of the Supper or Communion at the Lord's Table ; therefore in this Respect we hope our Communion is tolerably pure, and such as the Gospel requires.

And indeed it must be also confessed, that neither the Rubrick nor the Rules of the Church of *England* encourage such scandalous Sinners to come to the Table of the Lord : But there is very little Obedience can generally be paid to these Rules in the continual Admission of all Persons, as is practised now-a-days to this holy Sacrament : There are very few Ministers of our Parishes who usually attempt to lay these Bars against any Persons, known or unknown, who have a mind to come : And where a Minister of a tender and scrupulous Conscience has endeavoured to put the Rules of the Rubrick in practice against Persons

Persons of vile and prophane Character, he has exposed himself to great Difficulties and Troubles, and to many Hardships and vexatious Suits; and especially if they who offer themselves to the Communion, have wanted to qualify themselves at the Table of the Lord, for an Office at Court or in the City, by Land or by Sea *.

Well then, since you who assemble in separate Places of Worship maintain and enjoy a purer Communion in your Churches, should you not be very zealous and sollicitous, each of you for your selves, that you are no dishonourable Communicants at the holy Supper? that your Consciences and your Hearts are pure in the sight of God? that you lift up pure Hands at his Altar? And do you not feel this sacred Engagement on your Souls, to keep yourselves from the Infection of evil Company in the World, since you are not constrained to mingle with them in the Church?

Inquire of your selves, Who are your chosen and delightful Companions among Men? Is it with you as it was with *David*, who was *a Companion of them that fear the Lord*? Pf. cxix. 63. Are the *Saints, the excellent*

* See Dr. *Calamy* of Moder. Nonconf. Vol. III. p. 64. and Mr. *Raistrick's* Account of his Hardships in the Church of *England*, and his becoming a Nonconformist, at the End of that Volume, p. 8, &c. Lay Nonconf. justify'd, p. 32, 33.

182 *The Advantages of Dissenters*

excellent in the Earth, high in your Esteem, and is *your Delight* amongst them? *Pf. xvi. 3.* 'Tis granted, and the Apostle allows it, *1 Cor. v. 10.* that if you would always avoid the Company of the Wicked and the Prophane, *you must e'en almost go out of the World*, because the World is so full of them; and in buying and selling, in the daily Business and Commerce of Life, their Presence and Converse cannot be avoided: But he directs you to avoid them, as far as it may be done consistently with other Duties. And the great Question is, Who are the Companions of your Choice, and in whose Society do you take the most agreeable Satisfaction? Are the Sons of Vice and Impiety your Familiars and Intimates? And while you profess your Desire to be separated from them in the Church, do you chuse to dwell much with them in the World? Does not such a Conduct give too just an Occasion to charge you with Hypocrisy? What! cannot you bear to sit near the Lewd and the Prophane, the Drunkard or the Swearer in the House of God, for fear of defiling your selves with their Communion, and yet can you delight in their Company all the Week, and take so much Pleasure to meet them either in your own Houses or in the Houses of publick Resort, in Taverns, in gay Assemblies, at midnight Clubs, and in Sea-
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sons and Places of extreme Hazard to Virtue ? Can you take familiar Delight in those who neither love God nor fear him in the World, while you exclude them from a Place in the Church ? Is there no Defilement to be taken but in the House of God ? Is there no Infection but at the Sacrament ? What strange sort of Conduct is this ? Ridiculous and inconsistent ! And to what severe Reproaches do you expose the Protestant Dissenters, with all their Pretences to purer Communion, while you make the Company of known and profligate Sinners your free Choice and your daily Delight ?

VI. It may be reckoned among your Advantages for strict Religion and Virtue, *that your whole Conduct is strictly observed, and your Behaviour is watched with a narrow and severe Eye by many of your Neighbours of the established Church, and especially by those of them that hate you :* They are ready to take notice of every Failing, and to make sharp Remarks upon every Defect you are guilty of in your Duty to God or Man. You cannot step awry, but Censure and Reproach attend you. If there should happen to be *any Persons in your Societies for Worship, who are a Scandal to Religion,* you shall be sure to hear of it plentifully *, even tho'

* Lay Nonconf. justif. p. 17, 35, 43.

184 *The Advantages of Dissenters*

tho' perhaps they are ejected out of your special Communion : And this should awaken you to a double Watch over your selves, to a more constant and severe Guard upon all your Words and Motions.

'Tis true, the Eyes of God and Angels are ever upon us all, and this ought to have the most awful Influence on us, in order to secure us from every Sin and Folly : But it should also awaken you to a constant Care of your whole Conduct, when you remember that the Eyes of Men, and of some such as have no great Kindness for you, are upon you too ; and they are sharp and piercing to spy out every Transgression, and to magnify every Instance of your Departure from strict Piety and Virtue into a heinous Crime and Scandal. I confess this is no very pleasing Circumstance and Situation of Life, to stand forth as a Mark for every nice Observer, to have every Word and Motion watched and critically remarked by an Eye of Jealousy or professed Enmity : 'Tis no pleasing Circumstance indeed, but perhaps it is, or it should be, a profitable one ; for it carries in it a constant Spur to Duty, a constant Restraint upon sinful Appetite, and a Guard upon our whole Behaviour.

And here I cannot but make mention of an Observation which I have often made in the Course of my Life, *viz.* If a Person
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who professes himself to belong to the established Church is found guilty of Swearing or Cursing, if he drink to Excess, if he prove false and deceitful in his Dealing, if his Character be vicious and lewd, and he indulge Iniquities of the grosser kind ; there is no such mighty Matter made of it in the World, nor is the Scandal of such a Criminal thrown at all upon the Church it self : We never hear it said upon such an Occasion, *These are the Members of the Church of England* : But on the other hand, if a *Protestant Dissenter*, who attends constantly on the Worship of God in our separate Assemblies, and communicates with us, be guilty of any foul or infamous Crime, what a loud Clamour is raised in the Town ? What a noise spreads and echoes thro' the Neighbourhood ? And the Name of the single Offender is not only set up as a publick Mark for the Reproach of the World, but the whole Party of the *Dissenters* falls under Disgrace thereby ; *These are your Nonconformists ; These are your Saints ; These are the Men that pretend to Godliness, and who don't think our Church pure enough for them ; See what Hypocrites they are !* And thus they load the whole Profession and Party with the Crime and Scandal of a single Sinner. Now surely the View and Consideration of this Situation of Things, and this Circumstance of
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your Case, should make you all more watchful, more strictly religious toward God, more sober, temperate and careful in the Practice of all personal Virtues, and more exactly righteous and honourable in all the Affairs of the social Life, that you may never suffer your Foot to slide, nor give Occasion to those *who wait for your halting* to blaspheme the good Ways of the Lord, wherein you profess to walk. You are called by Providence to give double Diligence, and walk more circumspectly in every Station of Life, since so many watchful Eyes are ever upon you : It behoves you to keep a holy Jealousy over your selves, lest at any time you yield to Temptation, that the whole Body of the Dissenters may not receive a Wound and Infamy thro' your Misbehaviour.

SECTION IV.

Of the Obligations of Protestant Dissenters to greater Degrees of Holiness.

THUS I have finished the *first* general Head of this Part of my Discourse, which relates to the *real* or *supposed Advantages* that the Protestant Dissenters enjoy for their Improvement in Religion and Virtue above their Brethren, their Neighbours of the established Church : I proceed
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now to the *second* General, and that is to set before you *What special Obligations you lie under to practise higher Degrees of Piety and Morality by the very Profession of Religion which you make in this Way of Nonconformity*, and to enquire in the Language of our Saviour, *What do you more than others*, you who have all the following Bonds and Engagements lying upon you from your own Profession?

I. The most considerable and most universal Reason why you profess to dissent from the established Church, and to separate from them, is, *that you may make better Improvements in Religion than if you continued in their Communion*. Most of you who spend any Thoughts about the Grounds of your Separation, profess this to be your most general Motive, that you may serve and worship God in a Way more pleasing and acceptable to him, because you think it more agreeable to his own Word; you hope to obtain greater Communications of Grace from him by waiting on him in a more exact Conformity to his own Appointments; you walk in this separate Path, that you may make swifter Advances in the Christian Life, and speed your course in the Way to Heaven.

And indeed if you divide your selves from an Established and National *Christian* Church without this Design, I fear you will

will but deceive and disappoint your own Souls in your Separation. But on the other hand, if a holy Care and Sollicitude to serve God more agreeably to his Will, and a Desire after higher Attainments in your Religion, be your real End and sincere Intention; see then, that you make this appear by your growing Piety, and your Advancement in every Grace; and let the World see and be convinced by the Holiness of your Practice, that you have chosen the right Way to obtain your End, and that your pious Purposes are not disappointed. See that you lay *aside every Weight and the Sin that easily besets you*; and since you chuse a different Track, *run with double Speed the Race of Christianity that is set before you: Press forward beyond your Fellows, toward the Mark of your high and holy Calling*, and take larger Steps toward the Prize. Do you not declare you are the Children and Followers of those who in the former Age were called *Puritans*, because of their Profession of greater Purity of Life than their Neighbours? Why then do you not with more Zeal and Sollicitude avoid every Degree of Impurity and Defilement? Why do you not cleanse yourselves daily from every Pollution of Flesh and Spirit in a Manner and Measure answerable to your own Profession? In all your religious Duties be ye more devout;

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in the Practice of every social and personal Virtue be you superior to others ; and let the transcendent Degrees of your Fear and Love of God, and your Goodness toward Men, distinguish you if possible from your Neighbours, as much as you are distinguished from your profest and publick Separation from their Forms-of Worship.

Should any one have asked the Disciples of *Christ* after they had attended a considerable Time on his Ministry in particular Meetings, on Mountains, in Desarts, and by the Sea-side ; I say, should any one have asked them, Why do you continue in this manner to follow after a new Preacher, who has no Approbation or Countenance from Men of Figure and Power in the Established Church, and who teaches you to renounce their human Inventions and Traditions ? Surely they would say, 'Tis because we hope to please our God better, and to honour him much more than the Scribes or the Priests, than the Pharisees and their Disciples do, or the Bulk and Multitude of the *Jewish* Nation : 'Tis because we design and hope to make higher Advances in Virtue and Piety than they : We would not expose ourselves to the Inconveniencies and Difficulties, to the long Travel, to the Hardships and the Reproaches that we sustain, if we could content our selves with just so much Righteous-

ness and Religion as the rest of the Nation, or even the Scribes and the common Sort of Preachers of the National Church; and upon this Argument we may suppose our Saviour partly to build his Question in my Text, *What do you more than others?*

And as this was the Case of the Disciples when they followed after *Jesus* a new Teacher, and held their particular Meetings often in separate Places, so it is and will be generally the Case of all honest and sincere Persons in their religious Separations from any established Church whatsoever. What Advantages is it they aim at in dissenting from others in their Forms of National Religion, if it be not that they hope to advance more in the valuable Designs of sincere Godliness, and better to secure to themselves the Approbation and Favour of God by their peculiar and separate Methods of Worship.

'Tis therefore a most important and reasonable Question which I would put to your Consciences and my own this Day, *What do we Dissenters more than others, more than our Brethren of the National Establishment?* Do we make it appear in our whole Behaviour, that our Hearts are more holy and more heavenly? Is our Zeal for the Honour of God warmer than theirs? Have we a greater Detestation of those Sins which are too much indulged among some of them?

them? As we refuse to comply with the Traditions of Men, are we more exactly conformable to the Laws of God and the Rules of the Gospel of *Christ*? Are we more sober and temperate, and watchful in our personal Conduct? Do we practise superior Goodness towards our Fellow-Creatures, and exceed others in the Duties of Justice, Charity and Love? Alas, my Friends, let our Pretences rise never so high, if we do not attain something of this Eminence in Religion, or at least zealously endeavour after it, we lose the noblest Designs of our Nonconformity, and disgrace the peculiar Profession that we make in the sight of the World. If this be the Thing we pretend to, why do we not better answer our Pretences? Is there no other Difference to be seen betwixt us and our Neighbours of the Church of *England*, but that once a Week we turn our Backs upon the Parish Church, and resolve to worship God in a separate Place? Are we as vain, as thoughtless of Religion throughout the Week, as loose and sensual in our Conversation as the rest of the World? And are we content it should be so? When we take such a distinct Profession upon us, 'tis universally expected by Heaven and Earth, that we should distinguish our selves by our shining Virtues, as the Fruits of this our Profession. *God*, the great and blessed God, expects

expects it of us ; *Jesus* the Judge of all expects it of us ; the Angels who are Ministering Spirits in the lower World, and who behold our Conduct expects it of us ; our Neighbours around us expect it at our hands ; and our own Consciences will tell us that they have expected it of us too. If we neglect to seek this chief End of our Non-conformity, neither Scripture nor Reason, neither God nor *Christ*, nor Men nor Angels will approve of our Conduct, nor will our own Consciences speak Approbation or Peace to us in a wise and serious Hour of Review.

Before I leave this first Head of Argument, let me take hold of another Topick, and argue with you further upon the Foot of *your profest Separation*. Consider the Inconveniencies and Difficulties in some Instances, and some Seasons or Occurrences of Life to which you are exposed by this your Practice : Perhaps you meet with now and then a Frown, a Token of Contempt, or a Word of Mockery and bitter Reproach among your Neighbours, upon the account of your Profession ; you are often called *Schismaticks*, and charged with dividing the Church of *Christ* ; and it is possible you lie under some Disadvantages in Trade and Business in the World upon this account too, as well as 'tis sufficiently known that you are excluded by certain

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Laws from all Offices of Trust and Profit in the Nation merely for your Nonconformity. Besides this, there are some angry Bigots in the World who hate you and your Profession, and would blast you all together, and would rejoice to root you out of the Earth; tho' for the most part, I would hope these furious Enemies of yours are only such as are no Friends to the present Settlement of the Crown in the Illustrious Family who possesses it, and are Enemies to the Happiness of this Nation and the Liberties of Mankind: But however, 'tis certain there are many who envy and hate us; tho' we acknowledge it with Gratitude, to the Honour of our Ruler, that they have so much Equity and Goodness as to with-hold the Hands of the Sons of Violence from persecuting and destroying us. 'Tis certain that we are observed with an evil Eye, we are sometimes bantered and ridiculed by evil Tongues; we suffer many an opprobrious Name, many a malicious Sneer and insolent Affront, because we cannot comply with some Inventions of Men, and dare to worship God in another Manner than the chief Part of the Nation. Now shall we suffer all these Things in vain? Gal. iii. 4. And indeed it is, and will be in vain, that we expose our selves by our Profession to these Sufferings, if we have no Recompence in acquiring greater

Degrees of Virtue and Goodness ; in attaining firmer Hopes and a surer Interest in the Favour of God, and the Blessings of eternal Concernment.

Awake, awake, my Friends, and bethink yourselves a little : Do you not aim at something glorious and divine that will counterpoise all the Evils you sustain ? Awake, and let your Character and your Piety brighten upon the World, let your uncontested Virtues shine among Men, let them efface all the Gloom and Darkness that is thrown upon your Names, and overpower the unrighteous Scandal. What ? Shall we be cast out of all publick Offices, Trusts and Salaries as Men unworthy of Civil Benefits and Honours, and in many Instances be retrenched as to the more private and common Profits of this World, and yet content our selves to obtain none of the Treasures that relate to another World in the room of them ? Shall we bear the Scoffings of our Neighbours, and be derided as Fools and Phanatics ? Shall we be reviled as Men of Humour and Hypocrisy, as Deceivers and false Brethren, and content our selves to bear all these Indignities in the present Life, without gaining any thing by it with regard to Grace and Righteousness and the Life to come ? This would be to confirm the Reproach of Folly upon our selves with a witness, and justify the

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the World when they charge us with Mad-ness and Phanaticism. What is there can bring our Wisdom, or even our common Sense into question more justly than such a foolish Conduct, to profess and assume a Character in this World which sensibly exposes us to Loss and Shame, and yet not so much as to seek after any Recompence in the Gains of true Religion, in the Rewards and Honours of Heaven, and the Blessings of the World to come?

When our Saviour foretold his Disciples, while they followed his Ministry, that they *should be persecuted and hated of all Men for his Name's Sake*, he encourages them to bear up under all these Hardships, by promising them the Favour of his Father, his own Blessing, and a large Reward in the heavenly World, *John xv. 19. and xvi. 33. Matth. v. 10,---12. Because ye are not of the World, but I have chosen you out of the World, therefore the World hateth you : If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you : In the World ye shall have Tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the World, and in me ye shall have Peace. Blessed are ye when Men shall revile you and persecute you, and speak all manner of Evil against you for my Name's Sake ; rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your Reward in Heaven.* These are the Promises which our great Redeemer made to support the Spirits of his perse-
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cuted Disciples ; but 'tis always to be understood on this Condition, that they maintained their Character of exalted Virtue as the Disciples of the Holy *Jesus*, and in this View and Prospect they were wise and happy, notwithstanding all their Sufferings. But does not your own Reason tell you, 'tis a vain and ridiculous Thing in you to expose yourselves to the unkindness of your Neighbours, and the Loss of your Honour or Peace in any Degree for the Sake of separate Forms of Worship and Religion, if you take no Care to secure some superior Blessings by your Conduct, which will far over-balance all the Mockery and Ridicule, all the Hatred and Hardships you sustain? Is it not a very weak and senseless thing for any Person to bear Scandal and Reproach for being a Professor of strict Religion in any Form whatsoever, if he has nothing else to comfort him but the mere Manner, Shape and outward Form of this strict Religion? Will this empty Form and Shadow of Non-conformity balance against the solid Evils of Poverty and real Losses, against the bitter Scoffs and Jeers of an ungodly World? Is he not a Fool in Grain to take up with a despised and ridiculed Profession and Form of Godliness, if he neglects the inward Reality, the Life and Power of it, and the divine Hopes and Joys that belong to it, in order
to

to support and recompense his Sufferings ? A Hypocrite in any Party or Profession of Religion has but a very unprofitable Bargain at the Foot and Balance of the Account ; but to be a Hypocrite amongst the Dissenters is a Degree of Folly that wants a Name, when he gets nothing by it but Reproach and Contempt in this World, and Damnation in the other.

II. You profess by this your Separation, *that you dare to be singular in your Place, and Modes of Worship, and in the Ministration of Holy Things on which you attend* ; why then should you not dare to be singular in your Behaviour, in the Civil Life among your Neighbours, when any other Rules of Christianity call you to it ? You practise the Forms of Religion in a singular Manner with Courage, and why should you not dare to practise all Virtue and Godliness with holy Courage too in the Face of a World, that is ashamed of inward and real Religion, and almost ashamed of the Appearances of it, unless it be in going to Church ?

To be singular in our Manner of Life, and distinguish our selves from our Neighbours, is no part of Religion or Virtue considered in it self ; but there are many Seasons that occur frequently, and which will occur in all Ages of sinful Mankind, wherein every one who is a Servant of God, *in*

198 *The Special Obligations*

any Form or Party, is called to practise Singularity, and to distinguish himself from the vicious and irreligious World. *Moses* forewarns us of it in his early Days, and lays down this Rule in *Exod. xxiii. 2. Thou shalt not follow a Multitude to do Evil.* The Wicked of the Earth will always think *it strange that you will not run with them to the same Excess of Riot*, 1. Pet. iv. 4. Yet you are to remember, that you are *redeemed from this present evil World, that you might be a peculiar People to God, zealous of good Works*, Gal. i. 10. Tit. ii. 14. The People of God in every Generation have been distinguished from *a World that lies in Wickedness*, and our blessed Lord has most expressly foretold us in several Places, that there must and will be a Difference between the Men of the World and his Disciples. Now have you arrived at this holy Fortitude bravely to maintain this Distinction at every Call of Providence, and to shew your selves with more Zeal to be Nonconformists to a wicked World, than to divide your selves from your Christian Brethren, because of their different Forms of Worship?

When you are in company with prophane Sinners, who make a Jest of the Things of Religion, and trifle with the sacred Names of God and our Saviour, there is sometimes a fair Occasion in Providence,
and

and a loud Call of Duty to stand up for the Name and Honour of God, and shew your Zeal for Religion among those who seem to have renounced it : When you are in the midst of Infidels or Apostates from the *Christian* Faith, it may be sometimes proper to appear boldly in the Vindication of the Name of *Jesus* and his Gospel : When you see profligate Wretches wallowing in their Iniquities, and sporting with Things sacred, Conscience will tell you sometimes it is your Duty to bear your Testimony for the Authority of the Law of God, and for the Purity of Manners among Men : I will not say, 'tis always a necessary Duty ; there are Seasons when we should *not cast our Pearls before Swine*, where there is no probability of doing Good to any Person in the Company, and where they will not only *trample upon holy Things*, but *turn again and rend you*, Matth. vii. 6. Under this Pretence we ought not to maintain an everlasting Silence, and hear the Name of God always blasphemed and the Gospel of *Christ* ridiculed without any Remonstrance or Reproof.

If a Church-man persuade you to come and worship God according to the parochial and publick Forms, perhaps you would shew your self to be a *Dissenter*, i. e. a Separatist from the National Worship, and refuse to comply : Well then, if Sinners

would entice you to any wicked Practice, or would draw you away or divert you from your present Duty to God, to your Family, to your self or your Neighbours, I am sure that's a Season when you ought to shew your self a *Christian*, i. e. a Separatist from all that's sinful.

Singularity in our Ways and Forms of Worship and Separation from an Established Christian Church, is so far from being a Part of our Religion considered in it self, that it would be generally criminal in us, if we did not think there was something in that Church so defective, so irregular, or so imposing as to justify a Separation in the sight of God. To be singular in any Part of our Behaviour from our Brethren or our Neighbours, is not a Thing to be chosen or desired, or practised for it self, or its own sake; it looks too much like Humour and Fancy, or Pride or Conceit, unless there is something wherein we can exceed them in the Things of Duty and Virtue, in Matters of Religion and Godliness by this Singularity: The *Dissenting Interest* is neither worthy nor fit to be maintained merely for the sake of *Dissenting*, or for the keeping up of a separate Party in the Nation: But since we believe and are persuaded that God and our Consciences call us to Singularity and Separation from human Appointments in divine Worship, let us remember that

that Morality sometimes as well as Devotion requires its Votaries also, to practise Singularity and Courage : We must sometimes stand up alone for Virtue in a vicious Age, and maintain Sobriety, Temperance, Truth and Justice, in opposition to a Multitude of evil Doers. Let us appear to be all of a piece, and since we are not ashamed to be Separatists in the Cause of Religion, let us never be ashamed of it in the Cause of Virtue.

You profess to rank your selves among a People with whom a publick and sincere Regard to God and his Word, even in the common Affairs of Life, is not yet an unfashionable Thing, and God grant that it may never be so much put out of Fashion among us, as it has long been among the Bulk of this Nation ! See to it then that Religion influences your whole Form, and Manner, and Fashion of Life, that you dare not live as *without God in the World*, without conversing with him by daily Prayer and Praise : See that you dare not plunge your selves into the World, and the daily Business of your Calling, so as to bury and forget Religion all the Day long, and leave no time for some secret Addresses to the Throne of Grace. If there be any Person that practises the Rules of Temperance and Sobriety with greater Strictness and Prudence than his Neighbours ; if

there be any one that appears more remarkably just and true, and faithful in his Dealings amongst Men, or kind, charitable and benevolent to his Fellow-Creatures, and particularly eminent in the Practice of Meekness, Patience and Forgiveness to them that have injured him, let a Protestant Dissenter be the Man that dares be thus singular. *Phil. iv. 8. Whatsoever Things are eminently pure and lovely, and of good Report, if there be any Virtue, if there be any Praise, if there be any Thing of the Practice of Truth or Goodness that is peculiarly honourable in the sight of Men, let a Non-conformist have the Honour of this Peculiarity. He that is singular in the Church, let him bravely dare to be so in the World.*

O let it never be said by those who differ from us, and especially by those who hate us, " These are the Persons who profess Purity in Worship, but see how vicious they live ! They are as much given to Luxury in Diet, to Extravagance and Vanity in Dress, to every Thing that is sensual and voluptuous, or gay and vain, as any of us who don't make such Pretences to Religion : They give their Lips as wild and wanton a Licence as any amongst us ; they are as loose, as frothy, as unfavoury in their Discourse as any of their Neighbours ; they have

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“ no more Inclination, or at least no more
“ Courage to speak one Word for God
“ and Religion than we have ; they are as
“ ready to over-reach those who deal with
“ them, and to cheat and defraud in Mat-
“ ters of Trade as any amongst us ; they
“ are as often found tardy in the Perfor-
“ mance of their Promises, and in fulfil-
“ ling their appointed Payments ; their
“ Consciences will stretch as largely as any
“ of ours to indulge a pleasing Iniquity,
“ and they are as poor and wretched Per-
“ formers of any of the relative Duties of
“ the social Life ? ” Oh let it never be
said concerning any of you, that you are
as severe and unreasonable Masters, as idle
and unfaithful Servants ; that you are as
unkind and careless, as faithless and as in-
solent Husbands ; as vain and unthrifty, as
peevish and as noisy Wives ; as cruel Pa-
rents, and as undutiful Children ; as unge-
nerous Dealers, and as deceitful Buyers and
Sellers, as any of the rest of your Neigh-
bours : Let it never be said of you, that
you are caught as often in a Lye, that you
are as proud and haughty, as angry and pas-
sionate, as griping, as covetous and hard-
hearted to the Poor as any of the rest of
Mankind. What a shameful Thing would
it be if you should give Occasion to the
World to say, “ that notwithstanding all
“ your Pretences to Purity in Religion and
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“ your Separation from us in our Ways of
 “ Worship, as tho’ they were not pure
 “ enough for you, yet you make no more
 “ Conscience of Sin or Duty with regard
 “ to God or Man, in the Course of your
 “ Lives, than any of us from whom you
 “ separate.” What a cutting Thought
 will this be to our Consciences in a serious
 Hour, or on a dying Bed? What inward
 Reproaches, what Agonies will it raise in
 our own Souls, wheresoever we have given
 just Occasion for such a Censure of our
 Character, and such Scandals to be cast upon
 our Profession?

III. *You profess to maintain and vindicate
 Christian Liberty by your Dissent from the
 established Church; you profess to bear up
 and support the Freedom of Conscience in op-
 position to all the Inventions and Impositions
 of Men: This is certainly one Ground of
 your Separation, nor can I say ’tis an un-
 just or an unreasonable one; for when the
 blessed God has freed Mankind from the
 Burden of Ceremonies which himself had
 invented and prescribed to all the World
 before the coming of Christ, when he has
 delivered all the Nations from the bloody
 Rites of Sacrifice which he appointed to
 Noah and all his Sons, when he had re-
 leased the Jews from their Variety of Bon-
 dage, their Yokes of Servitude, their weak
 and beggarly Elements and carnal Ordinances,*
which

which neither they nor their Fathers could bear, certainly he requires all the World in the Language of the Apostle, *Gal. v. 1. to stand fast in the Liberty wherewith Christ has made them free, and not be again entangled with the Yokes of Bondage:* And if they must not dare to return to the various Forms and Rites of the Worship which God himself had once prescribed, and has now abolished, surely we cannot think it lawful for us to subject our selves to the Rites which Men invent, and to take up new Forms and Ceremonies which are not pretended to be of divine Institution, but to be meer Appointments of Men. But 'tis not my Work here nor my Design to enter into the Controversy any further than just to remember what our profession is. We declare for Liberty in the Things of God, and that no Man has Authority to bind us to such Ceremonies as God has not appointed. This, my Friends, is your Profession, to assert your own Freedom, and to vindicate the Liberty of Mankind and of the Gospel of *Christ*. And now my Question addresses you in the Words of my Text, *What do you more than others, who give themselves up as Subjects to the Authority of Men in Matters of Conscience?* Since you stand up for Liberty, ask your selves these two important Questions:

1st Quest.

1st Quest. How do you manage the Liberty which you vindicate? Do you turn your Freedom from the imposed Rules of Men into a Release of your Conscience and Practice from any of the Laws of God? Do you make your Discharge from human Ceremonies an Occasion to tempt you to discharge your selves from any of the divine Commands? Do you take the Liberty of not practising different Modes of Worship which God and your Rulers have given you, and under that Pretence indulge a Neglect of publick Worship, or a Course of Laziness and Sloth in Matters of Religion? Because you do not think your selves bound to Fasting on *Asb-Wednesdays* or *Good-Fridays*, do you give a loose to sinful Appetites? While you pretend to free your selves from religious Bonds of Confinement, do you suffer your selves *to be made Slaves to Sin, and to be carried away captive by the Devil at his Will?* 2 Tim. ii. 26. Wretched and hypocritical Pretence to Liberty indeed, if it be stretched to this vile Extent! The asserting your Liberty from all human Impositions in Worship will go but a very little Way towards your Acceptance with God, unless you are *free from the Bondage of Corruption*, and in this respect *translated out of the Dominion of Satan, and brought into the glorious Liberty of the Sons of God and the Kingdom of*
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our Lord *Jesus*. Be sollicitous therefore above all Things about a Release from the Power and Tyranny of Sin, that you may serve the Law of God with a ready Mind; and since you are *called into the Christian Liberty*, take heed that you use it not for an *Occasion to the Flesh*. This blessed Advice does St. *Paul* give to his *Galatian* Converts, *Gal. v. 13*. And the Apostle *Peter* is jealous of the same Danger among the Christians to whom he writes, and therefore while they are sensible of their Freedom, he warns them that they should not *use this Liberty as a Cloak for Iniquity*, 1 *Pet. ii. 16*. Nor let that vile Character ever be charged upon you which the same Apostle charges on some licentious Sinners who professed Christianity in his Day, 2 *Pet. ii. 19*. *that while they promise Liberty to themselves and others, they are the Servants of Corruption, and allure others into Wantonness*; of such he pronounces their *latter End to be worse than their Beginning*, and declares that the *Mist or Cloud of Darkeness is reserved for ever for them*, v. 17, 18, 19.

2d *Quest*. While you assert your own Freedom from the Impositions of Men in Point of Worship, are you as careful in that you do not impose your own private Opinions nor your own particular and unscriptural Practices on your Neighbours, in any religious Affair whatsoever? Do you never

set up your peculiar invented Phrases, your own Forms of Speech, and the particular and darling Notions of your Sect and Party, as a Test of the Piety or Orthodoxy of any of your Brethren, where the Scripture does not go before you in plain and evident Language?

How reasonable and necessary is it, that you should always give your Brethren of the Church of *England* their Liberty in full Measure to judge for themselves in Matters of Doctrine, Discipline, Worship and Practice, while in full Measure you assume this your selves? And take heed that you judge not the States and Persons and Hearts of others in their several different Practices and Sentiments, while you so constantly and justly exclaim against their Authority to judge or to censure you, or to impose any Thing on your Consciences. *St. Paul* in his 14th *Chapter* to the *Romans* gives happy Directions to Peace and Love amongst all Fellow Christians that hold the few necessary Articles of Faith and Practice, tho' they may differ widely in their Opinions about other Things.

While you release your selves from the pretended Authority of a national Church, because *Christ* in the New Testament has not established any such Church on Earth, see that you do not dare pretend to Authority your selves, nor presume to impose any

any Thing in Doctrine, Duty or Worship on the Minds or Consciences of your Brethren amongst the *Dissenters*, which *Christ* has not imposed, for I am sure he has given you no such Power ; God alone is the Lord of Conscience, and he has appointed his Son *Jesus* to be King and Ruler of his Church. The Power of imposing Truth or Duty on our Belief and Practice is vested only in him. The Authority which is given to the Rulers of the Church is but to declare what *Christ* has required and imposed. Go, says he to the Apostles themselves, *and teach all Nations to observe what I have commanded you*, Mat. xxviii. 20. All other Circumstances of human Actions in religious Worship, which are necessary to be determined at all, are to be settled in Congregations by a friendly Agreement among themselves, without any Pretence to superior Authority and Impositions. Dr. Calamy has set this Matter in a very good Light, in his Introduction to his second Volume of *Moderate Non-conformity*. Words of Command and Authority in Matters of *God* and Conscience come out of the Mouths of any Set of Men with a very ill Grace, while they remember that they are all Fellow-Servants to one Lord, even the great and blessed God, and to *Jesus* his Son, who is appointed Lord of all ; but there is nothing more absurd and inconsistent than the

set up your peculiar invented Phrases, your own Forms of Speech, and the particular and darling Notions of your Sect and Party, as a Test of the Piety or Orthodoxy of any of your Brethren, where the Scripture does not go before you in plain and evident Language?

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the Pretence of *Protestant Dissenters* to command and impose Matters of Faith, Worship and Practice beyond the plain Rules of Scripture. For a *Protestant* who owns the Bible to be a perfect and sufficient Rule both for himself and his Neighbour, and a *Dissenter* who disclaims the Authority of a whole national Church in Matters of Religion and the Things of Salvation, I say for Men of this Character to assume an imposing Power, this would be with a witness *to build again the Things you have destroyed*, as the Apostle speaks *Gal. ii. 18. and to make your selves Transgressors* with Evidence and Shame. A *Protestant Dissenter* who persecutes his Brother with bitter Reproaches and Condemnation, because he differs from him in some of the lesser Points of Religion, and excludes him as unworthy of his Communion for the sake of Mint, Anise and Cummin, or by the Test of some unrighteous *Shibboleth*, some Forms of Orthodoxy or Discipline of meer human Invention, I know not a Name proper for such a Criminal; for while he pretends to maintain his own Liberty, he makes his Brother his Slave: Let us watch, my Brethren, against any such Impositions creeping in among us, and whensoever we find any such Iniquities, let us purify ourselves and cast them out.

If there be any Persons in the Nation who are called to greater Degrees of Love and Forbearance than others, and who should stand further off from imposing on the Conscience of their Neighbour and from judging their Brother, we are the Persons ; we whom the Laws of God and the Laws of this Land have permitted to judge for our selves, and that even in opposition to the Rules and Constitutions of a national Church. If there be any Ministers or People in the whole Kingdom who should shine in Charity to Men, in Love and Condescension to their Brethren, and in receiving those whom *Christ* has received without laying Bars of *doubtful Disputation* upon them ; we should be those Ministers and those People, we who pretend to stand up to vindicate our Freedom from every Yoke of Bondage, and to support the Liberty of Men and Christians.

IV. Another Obligation which lies upon you to do more than others is this ; *you and your Fathers have professed to observe a greater Strictness in some necessary Practices of Religion and Virtue than the common Multitude of those who call themselves the national Church ; I say, the common Multitude : I desire you to remember the Caution which I gave in the Beginning of these Discourses, that I had no Design to compare the most strictly pious and religious Persons of the*
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Church of England with those of the *Protestant Dissenters*: I am well assured there are many on both sides who make a most serious Profession of Piety, and who practise strict Godliness; nor would they dare to offend the great God in any Point, thro' their great Tenderness of Conscience: but the Persons whom I compare in these Discourses are the Bulk or Multitude of the one Side and the other.

I will not maintain, and indeed I cannot believe that our Fathers heretofore have been in the right in every Punctilio of their Severities and Restraints which they have laid upon themselves and those of their own Household. Some of them did not so well understand that great Article of *Christian Liberty* by which they professed to walk; some of them, in order to obey that Advice of the Apostle that *they should abstain from all Appearance of Evil*, were sometimes inclined to restrain themselves and their Families from those Things which had no reasonable Appearance of Evil or Blame in them. But I dare and I will pronounce, that in some Instances of their Strictness they had the Word of God and the Reason of things on their side. The late Bishop *Burnet*, in his excellent Discourse on the *Pastoral Care*, does not scruple to acknowledge that our Fathers *had a good Character for Strictness in Religion, which gained them*
their

their Credit, tho' he suspects we in this Age *have in a great measure lost it*, Chap. VIII. p. 204. Now shall we by our sinful Neglect support and confirm this Suspicion? Wherein soever our Fathers have been in the right in this strict Profession and Practice, we doubtless are more abundantly obliged to awaken our selves to a pious Imitation of them, and *to do more than others* in our Day, as they did in theirs. Give me leave here to mention a few Particulars in which our Fathers eminently distinguished themselves from the bulk of their Neighbours, and this shall be the Subject of the following Section.

SECTION V.

Peculiar Practices of Virtue and Piety among the ancient Non-conformists.

I. **O**UR Ancestors the *Puritans* and *Non-conformists* distinguished themselves by their great *Reverence of the Name of God*, and keeping a constant Jealousy and Watchfulness over their Words, lest they *took that holy Name in vain*. This has been your Character in Days past, in the Age of your Predecessors, and I hope this Honour remains still amongst you.

When

When Persons, even such as appear sober and virtuous, have made free with the sacred Names of *God* and *Christ* on trivial Occasions, when upon some strange Story related in Company, or some new Occurrence in Life, they cry out, *O Lord, good God, God bless me*, without any Appearances of Solemnity or a serious Air; when in their daily Language and Discourse they can hardly ask each other a common Question, or request a common Kindness, but they enforce their Request or Enquiry with some divine Name, *for God's sake tell me, for Christ's sake do this for me*: I say, when we hear such Speeches, we have been wont to take it for granted that these Persons are not *Dissenters*, for we were never suffered in the Days of our younger Education to take those holy Names into our Lips in so thoughtless or irreligious a Manner.

Or in the usual Language of Life, Persons have been wont to confirm the Truth of what they speak by these sort of Oaths, *by my Faith*, or *upon my Salvation*, or *as I live*, or *as I hope to be saved*, or *as sure as God is in Heaven*, we could readily pronounce that whatever Religion they were of, and whatsoever Sect they pretended to, they could not be *Protestant Dissenters*; for we were never indulged to use such Affirmations, nor to make such trifling Mention of Things that relate to our infinite
and

and everlasting Interest ; we were never suffered, while we were under the Government and Education of our Parents, thus to break the Command of *Christ*, who forbids us in our common Discourse to practise Swearing, but requires that *our Communication* be maintained with plain *Yes or no ; for whatsoever* Forms or Words of Affe-
vation we use that border upon *swearing by God or Creatures* (whether at full Length or in Abridgment) carry some Danger of Guilt in them, and *come from the Evil-one*, Matt. v. 37. Now I think it would very ill become us to depart from these Instructions and Examples of our Parents, to abate our Respect for Things that are holy, to cast away our Reverence for an Oath and the awful Names of God and his Son, and to indulge our selves in this dangerous and criminal Language, which is too much in use with the common Multitude. I could wish indeed from my Soul, that there might be no Distinction ever left amongst us to know a Dissenter or a Churchman by such Forms of Speech, or by an Abstinence from them : I wish all our Brethren of the established Church would be as cautious and watchful against such unwarranted Freedoms as some of them are, and would forbear to break the third Command, which forbids us *to take the Name of the Lord our God in vain*, or to trifle with Things sacred

cred: But if any of them will continue to practise it, let us not be ashamed to distinguish our selves as the Off-spring of the *Puritans*, and as *Protestant Dissenters*, who have learnt of our Fathers to pay a religious Reverence to all that is holy.

Secondly, You and your Predecessors have been very much distinguished from the Bulk of the Nation by *observing the Lord's Day with greater Strictness*, in employing the several Parts of it in religious Worship, private or publick, so far as the Strength and Health of your Bodies would permit, and so far as is consistent with the common Necessities and Occasions of Life. This has been a Distinction of considerable standing, and that not in a Town or two, but generally throughout the Nation.

If Persons heretofore neglected to worship God publickly above once a Day, unless they were confined for want of Health, or by the necessary Duties of Life; if they counted it of no Importance how they spent their Time when publick Worship was ended; if they indulged themselves in little Recreations abroad or at home, or in unnecessary Businesses or Amusements; if they wasted the Afternoon in prolonging their Dinners, and filled up those Hours with the Pipe or the Glass, or with impertinent Conversation, which the more Serious employed in publick Assemblies of Worship:

ship; if they made the Lord's Day Evening a Season of familiar Visits, wherein they wore away another Hour or two in Discourse of secular Affairs, in trifling Subjects (as now-a-days over a Tea-Table) or in the more gustful and modish Language of Scandal and Defamation; if they made no Account of any other Part of the Day besides that which was actually spent in publick Devotion, but turned it into Hours of Diversion and Entertainment, we have been wont generally to conclude (and with good Reason too) *Surely these Persons can never be Non-conformists*, for their Education never would have permitted them to pay so slight a Regard to the Lord's Day.

Well, my Friends, how stands the Case now amongst you? *What do you more than others?* Does the same Distinction still remain between you and your Neighbours? Or is it lost and vanished away? I am well assured there are some Members of the National Church that pay a most religious Regard to the Day of *Christ* and his Resurrection; but there are Multitudes that make but little Account of it, especially when divine Service is ended. Are you careful, my Friends, to distinguish yourselves from these your looser Neighbours in this Matter? Or do you give yourselves up to vain Amusements and Impertinences on the Lord's Day, or to trifling and formal

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mal Visits ; and thus deprive two Families at once of the serious Improvement of what you and they have heard in publick Worship ? Are you careful to spend as much Time as you can in the Worship of God through *Jesus Christ*, and in the Concerns of your eternal Welfare, either in the Closet and Retirement, or with some pious Companions ? Or do you lavish away the Evening in familiar Forms of Complaisance and Ceremony, Entertainment and Diversion, without a Word of God and Religion, or recollecting the Sermons of the Day for your mutual Increase of Knowledge and Grace ?

I shall not detain you here to enter into a Debate about the *Morality of the Sabbath*, or the *Abolition* of it among other *Jewish* Ceremonies, or the *Changes* of it from the seventh to the first Day of the Week : I shall not stay to enquire what Degree of Holiness belongs to each Part of that Day, or to the seventh Part of Time ; but these three Things I think I may lay down for certain Truths.

I. If there had not been sufficient Commission given by the Authority of *Christ* for appointing the first Day of the Week, which was the Day of his Resurrection, to be the constant Season of solemn Assemblies for Christian Worship, I am persuaded the Apostles would not so frequently have
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chosen out and fixed that Day for the publick Ordinances of Preaching and Praying and Breaking of Bread? Now 'tis evident from the New Testament they practised this, and appointed it in the Churches which were converted to the Christian Faith: I add further, nor would it have been so universal and distinguishing a Mark of a *Christian* in those primitive Times to be an Observer of the Lord's Day; nor would it have been so early and so universally practised by all the Christian World after the Example of the Apostles, which is sufficiently manifest in the ancient Histories of the Church: 'Tis certain therefore that this was the Day appointed to the primitive Church for their religious Assemblies by Apostolick Practice and Direction, and 'tis most reasonably inferr'd they had the Authority of *Christ* for it.

II. If there had not been such a Season as one Day in seven maintained and continued for a Day of publick Devotion thro' the Christian Nations, considering the Opposition of Rulers, the vicious Course of the World, and the Negligence of Christians, it is pretty certain that the Cares and Labours or Pleasures of Life, that secular Busineses or idle Amusements would have long ago thrust Christianity almost out of the World, and have gone near to banish

true Religion and Godliness from the Face of the Earth : And where the Lord's Day is most neglected, serious Religion is almost lost and gone.

III. If after we have heard Sermons on the Lord's Day, and waited on God in publick Prayers and Praises, we should make a Custom of devoting all the rest of the Day to our own Purposes in the Labours or Diversions of Life, it would be a most effectual Way to lose and abolish all the pious Thoughts and the devout Affections, which might be raised in the Heart by any Part of the publick Worship in which we have been engaged : Thus the very Design of the Seasons of Worship would be lost, and all the pious Sentiments and Dispositions drowned and buried in Business or Pleasure.

It is the Reviewing of the Truths and Duties which we have heard in the Ministry of the Gospel, 'tis the Meditation of them in our Retirements, the Conference upon them in our Families or in friendly Discourse, the turning them into Matter of secret or Family Prayer, in Confession, Petition or Praise, and Converse about them between God and our own Souls, and the Carrying on of the same spiritual Designs by reading Books of Piety and holy Conversation, that is the only sure Way to render

der publick Worship effectual to fit us for Heaven, and to answer the religious Purposes of the Lord's Day.

If therefore any Persons in this Nation resolve to give themselves a Loose in this Point, and take no Care to improve the Hours of this Day to the grand Designs of Religion and Salvation ; if they will waste them away in Trifles, in useless Visits or Amusements, let it never be said that a *Protestant Dissenter* is amongst them, or gives any Encouragement or Countenance to such a Practice.

Thirdly, I am naturally led, in the next place, to mention *religious Discourse and Conference upon Themes of Virtue and practical Godliness*, as another Thing whereby *Dissenters* heretofore were used to distinguish themselves : They exhorted and comforted one another under their Sorrows by holy Conversation. If a Person with never so much Prudence and Seriousness should introduce a Discourse of Holy Things into a friendly or familiar Visit, and especially if he should give a Rebuke to any prophane Speeches, some of the Company would have been ready to say, *Surely this was some Dissenter, some precise Puritan* : And this Honour was done us by those who designed Contempt and Reproach.

Well, how stands the Case now ? Are not the *Dissenters* as backward as others

to begin religious Discourse, to put in a Word for God or Virtue, or to introduce any Thing of Heaven into their Conversation? Are not we as shy, and as much ashamed as our Neighbours of bearing the Face of Religion in the World? Do we keep upon our Tongues the Language of Piety, and attribute the prosperous or afflicting Changes of Life to God and Providence, or only to good Luck and Misfortune? Is our *Communication* such as may *administer Grace to the Hearers*, and maintain a Savour of Godliness upon all proper Occasions? Do we banish entirely from our Visits all loose and prophane Discourse, and the more notorious Crime of Scandal, and introduce in the room of it the Language of the Children of God? *They that feared the Lord*, in the Days of *Malachi* the Prophet, *spake often one to another*, for their mutual Support and Assistance in the Things of Religion; *and they shall be mine*, saith the Lord, *when I make up my Jewels*. The Apostle *Paul* bids the *Thessalonians* converse freely with each other upon the future Happiness of Saints, the Appearance of *Christ* in his Glory, his Descending to raise the Dead, to judge the World, and to carry up his Friends to everlasting Joy, *1 Thes. iv. 18. and v. 11.* This Practice would the Apostle fain introduce as a Custom or Fashion among his Converts to Christianity,

nity, who should distinguish themselves from the World. Let us enquire what is our Custom in this Case, and *what do we more than others?* Or have we duly maintained the pious Custom, the Practice and Honour of our Ancestors?

Fourthly, Another Thing wherein our Ancestors distinguished themselves from many of their Neighbours in the Towns and Villages where they lived, was in *Keeping more regular Hours for the various Duties to God and Man, in abstaining from vain Company and much Wine, in preserving better Order in Families, and in a more religious Concern in governing their Households, in maintaining the daily Worship of God there, by reading the Word and Prayer with an uninterrupted Constancy, and in training up their Children and their Servants to the Knowledge and Fear of God, and in the Faith of Jesus Christ, with utmost Sollicitude and holy Watchfulness.* 'Tis true these pious Practices were more common in the whole Nation three or fourscore Years ago than they are now: But if there be any Degeneracy in that respect among our Neighbours, is there not as great or greater Degeneracy in proportion reigning and visible amongst us?

Shall I address my self with Freedom to the Parents and Governors of Families? Are you as solicitous to keep up the Seasons

sons of Worship in your Households as your Fathers were? Do you not suffer every little Pretence now-a-days to break in upon the appointed Times of Family-Religion, and oftentimes to prevent it intirely? Nay, are there not too many among you, who scarce ever call upon God in their Families at all, unless it be perhaps on a Lord's Day Evening? Are you so careful to keep regular Hours for the various Parts of the Business of the Day, or have you learnt to change the Course of Nature, to turn Night into Day, and Day into Night, and to confound the Order of Things? Can the Seasons of Family-Worship be well maintained, or can the Master perform it with a clear Head and a pious Heart in the Evening, if he indulges his Amusements in publick Drinking-Houses till near eleven a clock at Night, or till the Hour of Midnight approaches? Is not evening Worship very often utterly neglected by this Means? Is there any such thing as Devotion paid to God in the Morning, even in those Families whose Affairs and Circumstances would admit of it, if there were a sincere Desire in the Masters to maintain it?

I grant, there are some Employments, Conditions and Cases of Life, where 'tis hardly possible for the Household to meet together in the Morning; but I am well assured

assured there are many Families wherein this Piece of Religion is neglected, who can make no sufficient Apology or just Excuse for it. 'Tis with Pleasure that I remember that elegant Reproof given to a degenerate Age in a Sermon preached, (but I think never published) by the late Bishop *Burnet* :
“ In the Days of our Fathers, said he,
“ when a Person came early to the Door
“ of his Neighbour, and desired to speak
“ with the Master of the House, 'twas as
“ common a Thing for the Servant to
“ tell him with Freedom, *My Master* is at
“ Prayers, as to answer now, that he is
“ not stirring.” This eminently refers to the Days of the *Puritans*, or the Time before the *Restoration*. In which Words there was a short, a gentle, and a comprehensive Rebuke given to three or four Vices at once, (*viz.*) to the Waste of Day-light in Sleep, to disorderly Hours, to the Neglect of Family Devotion, and to the being ashamed even of the domestick Forms of Religion and Godliness: All which now prevail so much amongst us. But if this Neglect has so much over-spread the Families of the established Church, have not the Dissenters lost their Religion also in a sad Proportion?

Will you complain that our Fathers did not always maintain the Decency in their Expressions in Family Worship which

becomes Persons addressing the great God, and that you are not capable of expressing yourselves with a due Degree of Propriety and Decency in addressing God while others are present, and therefore you entirely omit the Duty: But give me leave to ask, Is it not better to honour God in your Household by daily Acknowledgment of his Mercies, and committing your selves daily to his Care and Blessing, tho' you cannot do it with such Accuracy as you desire, than to forget God entirely, and never acknowledge him at all? Besides, as you have often heard from me, and I repeat it again, The Worship of God in various Forms of Prayer precomposed and fitted to the common Circumstances of Morning and Evening, is infinitely preferable to the Neglect of Family Religion, and the taking no Notice of God in your House. Now there are many such Books for daily Devotion written by some of the Divines of the established Church, where the Sense and Expressions are proper and pious: I wish some of our Brethren among the Dissenters would not only encourage, but assist their Flocks to offer up such Morning and Evening Sacrifices in those Families where now there is no Prayer. Those who find not in themselves sufficient Courage or Ability to pray without these Helps, may obtain excellent Assistance by the prudent Use
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of them. Where any peculiar Circumstances occur in Families, which may occasion the Omission or Change of a few Words or Sentences, or the inserting some new Petitions, it will be found no difficult Matter to those to practise this with Decency and Honour, who set about the Work in good Earnest, and seek for the Assistance of the Spirit of God who is called a *Spirit of Supplication*.

I might enquire further under this Head, Are you so diligent and sollicitous that your Children and Servants should know and love God, as your Ancestors have been? Does it appear in their Improvement in the Knowledge and Practice of Christianity above their Neighbours, that they belong to the Family of a *Protestant Dissenter*, whose Character in a former Age, was famous for Education in all the strictest Courses of Piety and Virtue? Or are your Households as ill-instructed, and as ignorant as any of your Neighbours round about you? What *have you done* in this Matter *more than others*?

But *Masters of Families* are not the only Persons that fall under this Head of Admonition: I fear there are others in our Age who continue from their early Education to worship in general amongst *Protestant Dissenters*, and yet neglect the good Customs of their Ancestors: Who spend

too many Hours of Life in publick Houses, who sometimes raising their Spirits a Degree above Cheerfulness, protract their Mirth beyond the Midnight Hour, and pacify their Consciences with this Pretence, that they have no Family which wants or requires their Presence at Home? But do not their Closets miss them? Do not their Bibles want their Perusal? Doth not *Solomon* wait for them with a Word of Reproof to those *who tarry long at the Wine*? Prov. xxii. 29, 30. Do not the Families where they dwell feel the Inconveniencies of such late Watches? Will not their own Health of Soul and Body find the mischievous Effects of it? Will not their Character suffer as the Off-spring of *Protestant Dissenters*, and the Profession which they still make of *Non-conformity*? Will they continue Non-conformists to the Church, and be so very conformable to the sinful World? Is this to *abstain from all Appearance of Evil*? You will find many more pertinent Enquiries on this Subject in a *Serious Address to those who unnecessarily frequent the Tavern*, printed lately in *New-England*.

In the *fifth* Place, may I mention *Frugality in Expences and Industry in their particular Callings*, as a remarkable Pair of Virtues among our Predecessors the *Puritans* and the *Protestant Dissenters* our Fathers? I mean particularly in this Respect, that
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the Want of these Virtues scarce ever appeared in the Ruin of Families, and a Bankrupt was almost an unknown Name amongst them: Such a Man would have borne a long and heavy Load of Infamy, and have been excommunicated at once, and cast out of the Church with Abhorrence, in our Fathers Days, unless he could with the greatest Evidence have made it appear, that some sudden overwhelming Distress, some ruinous Providence, or some surprizing Loss had been the Occasion of it.

But how stands the Case now? Is not *Bankruptcy* reckoned too small a Crime amongst the Dissenters as well as amongst their Neighbours? And that where there can be found no other Reason for it, but that they have lived too fast, they have affected the Luxuries of Life in their Dress and Furniture, Food, Equipage and Attendance, and would vie with their Neighbours in Splendor, Grandure and Expence, where the Circumstances of their Estate or Trade have not been able to afford it? Or perhaps they have frequented Taverns early and late, they have habituated themselves to a Morning Whet, to prepare for some luxurious Dish at Noon; they have indulged their Pleasures and neglected their Shop, they have trifled away their Time in idle Company, and left the Business of the proper Hour undone; or it may

may be they have sought to grow rich at once by plunging themselves into Trade and Debt beyond all Proportion of their own Estate, or Possibility of Payment, if they should meet with any disappointing Accident ; and they have too often assumed the Character of the *Wicked, who borrows when he knows not how to pay again*, and run on borrowing without End, and without Measure, so long as they could find any Artifice to support Credit ; they have supplied their Shops with Goods, their Table with costly Provisions, their Houses with rich Furniture, and their Family with shining Apparel out of the Purse of their credulous Neighbour, and perhaps made him pay their heavy Scores in the Tavern also. A Man who should have been found in the Practice of half these Vices, would never have been called a *Dissenter* in the Days of our Fathers ; and 'tis a heavy Shame, and an insupportable Disgrace, that there should be any such Characters in our Day that should wear the Name of a *Non-conformist* : But 'tis well there is Purity of Discipline enough in our Churches to refuse them at the Table of the Lord.

I proceed now to the *sixth* and last Thing wherein the Protestant Dissenters were wont eminently to distinguish themselves, and that is in their *Abstaining from those gayer Vanities and dangerous Diversions*
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of their Age, which border so near upon Vice and Irreligion, that sometimes 'tis pretty hard to separate them; such are many of our *midnight Assemblies, midnight Balls, lewd and prophane Comedies, Masquerades, publick Gaming Tables and deep Play*, and such like Places and Methods of modern Diversion, where Temptations abound and surprize the Unwary, where Virtue and Religion are in extreamest Hazard, and sometimes receive a sore and lasting Wound. In this respect shall I put the Question, *What do you more than others?* 'Tis granted there are some Persons of the established Church that have avoided these Things as well as our Fathers the *Puritans*, and in some few Families, even of Figure and Condition, these perillous Amusements may be disallowed or seldom frequented: But 'twas the constant and known Mark of a *Protestant Dissenter* in former Days, to refuse Attendance upon any of these kind of Diversions, and boldly to deny his Company when he was never so much importuned. I hope we have not utterly lost those Pieces of *Puritanism* amongst us.

I grant that our present Age having run so much greater Lengths in Liberty than the Age of our Ancestors, there may be some degrees of allowance, or at least some Excuses drawn from the too general Custom of others in those Things which cannot

not be certainly proved to be sinful, tho' they may possibly have a dangerous Appearance and Tendency: When a whole Age takes large Liberties, even Persons of Sobriety and Virtue are under great Temptations to extend the Limits of their Rules of Practice? 'Twas a known saying of one of the Ancients, that "those Things might be done by Men of Virtue among the Rabble of *Romulus*, which ought never to have been done in the Republick of *Plato*." 'Tis granted further, that it is hard to prove every one of these Diversions I have mentioned to be absolutely and universally unlawful: And it is possible that Persons of Piety and Seriousness may give themselves Leave, upon just Reasons, to attend once or twice in the Course of Life upon such Diversions; perhaps it may be done in order to know what they are, that they may not utterly condemn Things which they know nothing of, and that they may pass a just Judgment concerning them; or upon some other very uncommon Occasion and Occurrence, where the real Service or Advantage does plainly overbalance the Danger of hurting our own Spirits, or of giving a bad Example to others.

But upon the Whole, it must be confessed, that to make this Sort of Entertainments a frequent Practice, tends greatly to corrupt

corrupt the Savour of Piety, and flatten our Relish for Divine Things; 'tis ready to thrust out the Religion of the Closet and the Family, to awaken the Springs of Virtue, to take off the Guard of the Conscience, to sensualize the Mind and fill it with vain Images, which too often pollute the Imagination, and oppress the young Seeds of Virtue and Godliness, that were beginning to spring in the Heart. And I am bold to say, that if our Fathers were in any degree too rigid and austere in pronouncing these Things absolutely criminal and sinful, and in their utter Prohibition of themselves and their Household from ever once attending upon them; 'tis certain that we their Children are much more criminal in giving too great a Loose to many of these Diversions. Can you not name the Dissenters who waste *that Time* at a Playhouse, or a vain Assembly of Merriment, at a publick Gaming-table, or a Dancing-room, *that Time*, I say, which belongs to God or their Families? Who spend those Seasons in late Visits and private Balls or at Cards, whereby evening Devotion is excluded utterly? Who can wear out whole Hours in these foolish and perillous Recreations, and complain they have no Time for Prayer? Can you point to no Persons who are Members of Dissenting Churches, who intice their Acquaintance to these Vanities? Do

Do you know no Mothers who lead their little Daughters thither, nor Fathers who permit their Sons to go without Controul? And do they know, or will they not believe that the Road to Lewdness and Impiety, to Ruin and Beggary, lies thro' these Scenes of dangerous Diversion? The Loss of Religion, the Loss of Time, the Loss of Virtue, the Loss of Reputation, the Loss of Estate in many Families of the Nation, bear a loud and lasting Testimony to the dismal Influence of these Practices; and, methinks, a Protestant Dissenter, who professes to maintain greater Degrees of Purity in publick Worship, should also be solicitous to keep himself pure from these Appearances of Evil in publick Life, and to abstain from those Stages of Vanity wherein there is so much Danger of Defilement and Mischief.

To sum up all in general, your Fathers had an honourable Character, and a very great Reputation, even among the looser Parts of the Nation, for strict Virtue, for exemplary and sincere Godliness beyond the common Bulk and Multitude of those who called themselves the Established Church; for if any Person appeared to be strictly religious and fearful of indulging any Sin or Compliance with evil Company, if he were scrupulous of any doubtful Practice, or attempted to give an Admonition

to the Sons of Vice, he was presently called a *Puritan*, or a *Fanatick*, or *Presbyterian* by way of Reproach. This Honour was a frequent Tribute paid by the ungodly World to the superior Virtue and Merit of your Ancestors and their Profession of Non-conformity. What is become of this your Reputation, this honourable Character? Have you lost your good Name? Have you sold your Glory for the Indulgence of the Follies and Vanities of Life? Have you fallen into such a Neglect of strict Religion as leaves no other Distinction between you and your Neighbours, besides your Worship once a Week in a different Place and Manner? 'Tis time, my Friends, when Religion is sunk into such an universal Decay in the Nation, 'tis time to enquire whether we have not suffered it to decay amongst us also, whether we are not Sharers in the common Degeneracy. It is high time to awaken our Souls, and enquire, *What do we more than others?* If the Bulk of the Nation be gone far in the Neglect of Virtue and Godliness, let us not dare to follow the Multitude, and make our Profession of Separation an empty Name, and our Pretence to purer Worship a mere Badge of Hypocrisy. Let us remember, if God should take up his Rod into his Hand, to punish a sinful Nation with an overflowing Scourge, we who follow

low any of the vicious Customs of the Age, who conform to the Iniquity of the Times, and never separate our selves from the growing Ungodliness of the Land, shall be mingled with our Neighbours in the common Calamity and Desolation : Our Profession of a separate and purer Communion will but aggravate our Guilt. If we do no more than others in the Practice of sincere Piety, why should we expect to be distinguished from others by any peculiar Instances of sparing Mercy ?

SECTION VI.

Of the special Advantages for Piety which some Persons of all Parties enjoy above others.

HAVING ended my Survey of the *special Advantages* for Improvement in Piety which are found in the separate Assemblies of *Protestant Dissenters*, above those who generally attend on the Worship of the *Established Church*, and the *special Obligations* that we lie under to do more than others, I proceed one Step further, which shall be the last ; and that is to survey any other *peculiar Advantages*, or *peculiar Obligations* which belong to some Persons of all Parties among us above their Fellows, and to enquire into their Behaviour and Improvement

provement in practical Godliness, whether it has been answerable to the special Circumstances of Obligation and Advantage with which the Providence of God has favoured them.

And here let it be observed, that tho' these two general Heads of *Obligation* and *Advantage* are often found together, and belong to the same Persons; for every *Advantage* lays a special *Obligation* on him that enjoys it; yet for Method's sake it may be more proper to treat of them distinctly.

First. *What are the Advantages which some of every Party enjoy above others?*

I. I will address my self then to *you who have been blest with a more strictly Religious Parentage, and pious Education*, among any Party of Christians whatsoever; and borrowing the Words from the Lips of our Saviour I would enquire, *What do you more than others?* You who have been trained up in the Forms of Godliness from your youngest Years, and the Nursery has been made as it were a *Bethel* or a House of God; you have been early taught to read the holy Scriptures in which *Timothy* was instructed from his Youth, to the great Honour of *his Mother and Grandmother*, whose Names have an everlasting Memorial in the Book of God, 2 *Tim.* i. 5. and iii. 15. You have been nursed up in the constant Attendance on the Worship of God in the Family,
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and in the publick Assembly ; you have been taught from your Infancy to pay Honour and Respect to every Thing that relates to God and Religion ; how stands the Case with you now ? Do you pay more Honour to God in the World than is practised by your Neighbours ? Do you maintain a greater Reverence to Things sacred, and do you walk more closely with God ? The Examples as well as the Advices of your Parents have been continually set before you ; you have been instructed in all the Rules of Honesty and Virtue, of Sobriety and Kindness, one would expect that you should have been a considerable Blessing to the World, and honourable Instances of all that is pious towards God, and of all that is charitable towards Men under such happy Advantages ; enquire therefore, what is the Frame of your Heart, and what has been the Conduct of your Life ? Have you forgot the Labours and Cares of your Parents, and the religious Practices which they introduced into your youngest Years of Life ? Are you grown weary of them already ? Do you despise all these serious Things in the wanton Gaiety of your Youth, as the Follies of Childhood, and the Errors of the Nursery, and the Weaknesses of your infant State ? This is the Reproach, this the Scandal which some wild young Rebels have insolently cast on all the pious Cares of their

their Parents, and the Forms of a religious Education : But we hope better Things of you, and that you have grown up from the lower Class of Instruction to some of the more manly and advanced Lessons of Godliness and Virtue ? Surely you can shew a fair and honourable Superstructure, since you had so happy a Foundation ? Are you not arrived at higher Degrees of Religion and Goodness than your Neighbours, since your early Blessings did so far exceed theirs ? This ought to have been your Character, and we hope this has been indeed your Practice.

Methinks some of you should say thus to your selves, Am I not a Branch of an ancient pious Family ? Am I not a young Descendant of the People of God thro' many Generations ? What care ought I to take to support the Honour of my Ancestors, and the Dignity of my Family in the sight of God and Man ? 'Tis not enough for me to compare my self with others, and content my self to be as pious and as sober as they are who never enjoyed such early Blessings ; but I am bound to maintain a visible Superiority in the several Instances of Piety and Virtue, if possible, above my Neighbours, that the ancient Reputation and Credit of my Name and Family among the Churches of *Christ* may not sink into Disgrace, or lie buried in Forgetfulness, lest the

the World and the Church should join in the deserved Reproach and Infamy of so degenerate a Plant as I am.

Can you not remember the wise Counsels and compassionate Advices which came daily dropping from a Father's Lips, and from the Fondness of his pious Heart? Can you not remember the tender Admonitions that a Mother has given you rising and going to rest, while she softened every Word with a Tear of Love? Have you not known their painful Sollicitude of Soul for your Happiness and your eternal Interests? What have you done with all these Lessons of Piety, these Assistances to Virtue and Goodness? Have you cast them all behind your back, and are you grown as negligent of God and *Christ*, and Religion and Sacred Things, as those who have been brought up like the Savages of the Wilderness, and have been suffered to run at large in a wicked World, thoughtless of God and of all that is holy? Have you taken no more Care to practise the Rules of Sobriety and Temperance than those who have been nursed up in a wild and licentious Indulgence of Appetite and Passion? Have you no more Strictness in your Morals than those who were born in Families which made no Pretences to Virtue, and took no care to instil the Principles of Religion and Goodness into the Souls of their Off-spring? 'Tis time, my Friends,

'tis high Time to bethink yourselves and put such Enquiries as these to your own Consciences; these early Blessings will become a terrible Aggravation of your Guilt in the great Day of Account, if the Judge shall then find that you have abused and lost them.

II. You *who have sat under a serious, a fervent and evangelical Ministry*, who have heard betimes of the Evil of Sin, who have been taught the Danger of your State by Nature, that you are afar off from God and Heaven, you who have been instructed early in the Gospel of *Christ*, and the Methods of his Salvation by the preaching of the Word, *What have you done more than others?* You have known *Jesus* betimes, and learnt his Offices as a Mediator to bring Sinners near to God, as a *Prophet* to reveal the Mind and Will of God to you, as a *High Priest* to make Atonement for Sin on Earth, and to intercede for you in the Court of Heaven, as a *King* to give you Laws, and to govern you, as a Heavenly *Example* of all that is pious toward God, and beneficent toward Man: Have you ever endeavoured to impress on your own Hearts a deep and humbling Sense of your sinful and dangerous State without renewing Grace and an Interest in the Mediator's Love? Have you ever yielded yourselves up to this blessed Mediator, and received his Salvation? **Have**

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you prayed earnestly for the Divine Influences of the Holy Spirit, which you have been often told are promised in the Gospel, to make you new Creatures, and assist you in every Duty? Have you had a constant awful Sense of Death and Judgment, of Heaven and Hell, which have been so frequently set before you in the Ministry of the Word, and imprest upon your Ears and your Consciences with Life and Fervency? Have your Fruits of Holiness been answerable to this favourable Cultivation which Heaven has bestow'd upon you? Do you remember that awful Representation of your Case by the Apostle in *Heb. vi. 7. The Earth which drinketh in the Rain that comes oft upon it, and still bears nothing but Briars and Thorns is rejected of God and is nigh unto Cursing, whose End is to be burned?* And can your own Reason or your Conscience afford you one word of Apology or Defence against this righteous Curse and this burning Sentence?

Let us think with ourselves what Multitudes there are who have not been trained up in the ways of publick Worship, who thro' the Wickedness of their Parents, or thro' their great Distance from the Places of any religious Assemblies, have been very much unacquainted with any of the Blessings of a Gospel Ministry: Think what Numbers of Families, especially in the Country, are
brought

brought up to the Labours and Drudgeries of Life at the Distance of some Miles from a Church of any kind, and are not able to attend on any Ministrations of the Gospel without great Fatigue and Inconveniences: How transcendent have our Advantages been above others? Have we made a right Use of these Blessings? We who dwell as it were in the House of God, who live near the Gates of *Zion*, who have the Ordinances of *Christ* brought almost to our Doors, have we delighted ourselves in the Worship of the Sanctuary and in the Assemblies of the People of God? Or have we cried out *What a Weariness is it?* And have we neglected the Methods of Grace which the Providence of God has brought so near us? Have our Lips and our Lives and whole Behaviour manifested that we have been often with God, and that we have been nourished up in Holiness with the Provisions of the House of God? Do we think these heavenly Provisions will never be accounted for? Or that the great God will never ask what Use we have made of them all?

III. *You who have been favoured with religious Friends, Companions and Acquaintance in the Course of Life*, such as you may converse with freely about the Things of God and your own Soul, and who will be ready to help you onward to the Way to Heaven, *What have you done more than others?*

How desirable a Thing is it for young Christians to have such a Friend as *David*, *Pf. lxvi. 16. Come unto me and I will tell you what God has done for my Soul?* How happy is it to be placed amongst such Acquaintance who will walk with you in the Road to Salvation, and with whom you may *go to the House of God in Company?* When young Persons first begin to be awakened to a Sense of Sin, to enquire *what they must do to be saved*, and to *set their Faces toward Heaven*, how sweet and unspeakable a Blessing is it to have a religious Friend near them, to whom they can unbofom themselves, who can assist them with their Advice, encourage them with their Company, support them by their own Experience, and keep Religion warm in their Hearts by holy Conference? Who can give them a gentle Admonition of their Danger, who can stir them up to Duty whensoever they grow negligent, and recall them when they wander from the Paths of Piety and Peace? What Advances in Holiness are justly expected from Persons who have enjoyed such an Advantage as this?

How afflictive and melancholy is the Case of many Persons in their younger Years, whose Lot is cast in Families where there is not so much as the Profession or Form of Godliness? Who have had not one religious Acquaintance, not one Friend to speak a serious

rious Word to them for Months or Years together? Who are under the perpetual Impression of evil Communications and the mischievous Influence of wicked Companions? Who are drawn away betimes into Snares and Defilements ere they are aware of their Danger? How unhappy are they who instead of hearing pious Discourse live daily in the midst of Prophaneness? Who are surrounded with the Language of Hell, and where Curses and Oaths and Blasphemies of the Name of God are made constant and familiar? And if at any time a holy Thought, or an awful Sense of Sin be awakened within them, the divine Spark is quenched on a sudden, and never suffer'd to kindle into a Flame; and every hopeful Appearance of Religion or Virtue is blasted and destroyed in the very Bud? How much more blessed are your Circumstances who have been freed from the Temptations of evil Company in the dangerous Years of Youth? 'Tis expected that you should preserve yourselves more unspotted and pure from all the Vices of the Age, that your Lips and your Lives should be untainted with the licentious Impiety or Leudness of the Times, that your Behaviour should be more agreeable to the Rules of strict Godliness, and your Virtues in the World should shine with a more illustrious Light and your Souls be animated with the pure Flames of Devotion, since you have

had nothing to damp or discourage them. But on the other hand, if ye have run into the Paths of Folly and Madnes without the Allurements of an evil Companion, without the Influence of a wicked Example, without those Temptations to which others are exposed, how aggravated is your Guilt in the Sight of God, and how deep and sensible ought your Repentance to be!

IV. *You who have had Books of Piety and Religion put into your Hand from your youngest Years*, and have been taught to read the great Things of God and of your Salvation, what have you learnt, *what have you done more than others?* You who have been excited and encouraged to acquaint yourselves with the necessary and important Things of Religion by reading, who have had the Rules and Advices, the Precepts, the Promises and Threatnings of the Word of God drawn up into a narrow Compass in religious Treatises, and set before you in a most powerful and perswasive manner, you who have enjoyed the Labours of your Fathers, and are addressed by the Dead and the Living, in their practical and pathetick Writings, with the kindest Exhortations to Virtue and Piety, and the most awful Warnings against every Sin, you who have been allured by all the most engaging Methods your Parents or your Friends could think of to acquaint yourselves with the Histories of
Scripture,

Scripture, the Doctrines of Religion, the Examples of Godliness, and the important Affairs of your immortal Souls; 'tis expected that you should exceed others in practical Godliness since you have enjoyed all these Assistances.

Let us be persuaded to consider with ourselves, how many there are of our Age that never had one pious Book put into their Hands, and it may be they have never been taught to read; or if they have learnt the Art of Reading, it has been employed from their Childhood in wanton Songs, in lewd Novels, or trifling Romances; and thus their Fancies and their thinking Powers have been unhappily tinged with Iniquity, and vitiated even from their youngest Years: What Degrees of Holiness have we attain'd higher than they? What Improvement have we made of our Privileges to acquire more eminent Advances in Piety, and get further onward in our Way to Salvation?

V. *You who have had Closets or secret Chambers at your Command, and proper Places of Retirement provided for you, wherein to retreat from the World, and converse with God and your own Hearts, What have you done in Religion more than others?* This is a most considerable Advantage for Improvement in Godliness. *Matt. vi. 6.* our Saviour bids us *enter into our Closets, and pray to our Heavenly Father who seeth in secret,* and he

promises in his Father's Name that he *will reward us openly.*

What Multitudes are there in the World whose Parents have been so negligent of serious Religion both in themselves and their Off-spring, as never to contrive or provide for their Children either any Opportunities or any Conveniences for secret Worship; nor have the young Creatures ever been taught to retire from the World, and call upon God in secret? And what Numbers also have always lain under such strait Circumstances even from their Childhood, that they are seldom able to find a retiring Place, the whole Family being confined to a single Room or two? And if at any Time the Word of God has reached their Consciences, and awaken'd them to a painful Sense of their Sin and Danger, if they have been earnestly enquiring after Relief and Pardon and Salvation, when their Souls have been full and ready to overflow under a deep Impression of divine Things, they have neither had a Friend into whose Ears they could vent their inward Sorrows, nor a secret Corner to retire where they might pour out their Souls before God? This has been a most afflictive and painful Hindrance to young and early Religion: But as for you who have enjoyed blessed Advantages for Retirement, what have you profited by them? O say thus to your own Souls, Have I
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made more constant Visits to Heaven than others? Have I conversed more frequently with God than they? Have I arrived at a more humble and intimate Acquaintance with God thro' *Jesus Christ* the Mediator? Have I attained greater Freedom at the Throne of Grace, and treasured up richer Experiences about the Duty and the Grace of Prayer, the Pleasure and the Success of it? Have I learnt more of the Temper of my own Heart when I have had such Conveniences for Retirement and for Self-examination, such Opportunities to converse with God and my own Soul, and to transact the important Affairs of Eternity? Which of us in this Assembly who have enjoyed this Advantage have not Reason to smite upon our Breast, to acknowledge our Guilt, and to mourn before the Lord?

VI. *You who are not so overburden'd with the Businesses and Cares of Life but you can find frequent Seasons of Leisure, which may be employed in the Concerns of your eternal Interests,* What do you more than others? Methinks, when I observe some Persons, and even whole Families under such Degrees of Poverty, that they are forced as it were to plow and thresh for their Bread from Morning to Night thro' the whole Week, who are as it were chained to the labouring Oar, and must sweat and toil early and late, and break in upon the Hours of natural Sleep

and Repose in order to support this mortal Life, and to furnish themselves or their Household with Food and Raiment; when I observe how very little Time or Leisure they can employ to the Purposes of Religion for their own Profit, or for the spiritual Benefit of their Off-spring, I cannot but pity them at my Heart: And if at any time they have had any Breathings of Soul after God or Godliness, the perpetual Cries of Nature in their poor starving Families have almost drowned the Voice of awakened Conscience, and made them neglect *the one thing needful*: They have been so constantly engaged *in labouring for the Bread that perishes* that they have little time to seek *that which endures to eternal Life*. Surely upon a Review some of us should be awakened to reflect upon many wasted Hours of Leisure that we have spent in Vanity, and whole Days that have been squander'd away in foolish Trifling or vain Amusement. Oh how much better might many of these happy Seasons have been improved in Closets and retiring Rooms, in Reading or Prayer, to carry on the Designs of Religion and our everlasting Happiness!

How valuable a Thing is Time, tho' it flies away in Silence and so much unnoticed and unregarded! Time for Rebels to seek their Peace with God! Time for Guilty Creatures to implore a Pardon? Time for those

those whose Hearts are by Nature corrupt and sinful, to labour with their hard and sinful Hearts by applying the Promises, the Precepts and the Threatnings of the Word, in order to soften, to purify and refine them! Time to wrestle with God in Prayer for the Assistances of his Spirit! Time for miserable Creatures to pursue Happiness! Time for mortal Creatures to prepare for Death, and for their immortal Spirits to get ready for Eternity! How richly might Time here on Earth be improved *to lay up Treasures in Heaven*, to gain high Degrees of Religion and every Grace, and to make swift and glorious Advances towards the State of the blessed? How much more than others should we practise Religion and Godliness who are bless'd with this Treasure of Time? What further Advances should we have made in the Road to Heaven who have any considerable Share of Time and Leisure at our own Disposal? And how many wasted Hours and Moments have the best of us to account for, which might have been employed to sublimer Purposes, and have raised our Souls nearer to God?

VII. *You whom the God of Nature has distinguished by any natural Talents or Qualifications above others*, what have you done in the Service of God more than others?

You who are bless'd with sprightly Parts, with a Sagacity of Mind, with a solid Rea-

son and Judgment, with active and vigorous Powers of Nature; have you learnt more of God than those who are of slow Understanding, and whose Minds are less repen- tive of Knowledge? Have you gained a deeper Insight into the Grounds and Foundations of the Religion which you profess? Are you better acquainted with the great and important Articles of the Christian Faith and Practice than others? Can you *render* a better *Reason of the Hope* that is in you according to the Advice of the Apostle *Peter*, 1 *Pet.* iii. 15? Can you say more for the Defence and Vindication of the Gospel against the bold Attacks of the Atheist and the Infidel? Have you set your Ingenuity at work in any happy Contrivances for the Honour of God, or for the Welfare of Men? When the great Judge shall make an Enquiry, *How have you employed your brighter Talents of Wit and Reason?* 'twill be no sufficient Answer to tell him how busy you have been in Trade, and how ingenious to enlarge your Estates, to build fine Dwellings, and to add Field to Field, and grow richer than all your Neighbours, while you have used neither Reason nor Thought in the Service of Religion. But 'twill have a much worse Appearance still, if it shall be found that you have turned the Edge of your Wit against Religion and made yourselves and your Companions merry at the
Expence

Expence of the Honour of *Christ* and his Gospel; that you have been sharp and ingenious for the Contrivance of new Vices and the Practice of Folly and Madness; that you have been swift to improve in every thing besides Religion and Virtue, and that you have been *wise to do Evil, but to do Good have had neither Knowledge nor Inclination*, *Jer. iv. 22.* Such bright and ingenious Sinners will expose themselves to the fiercer Flames of the Indignation of God, and those who have thus abused the Sharpness of their Wit shall feel the keener Pain in their Consciences.

You who have been endowed with strong and capacious Memories to treasure up much Knowledge, to retain long what you have learnt, and to recollect it with Ease, with what Sort of Treasure have you furnished this noble Repository of the Soul? Have you laid up nothing there but Trifles and Fooleries, nothing but Stories and Jests, but Vanity and Impertinence, or Leudness and Scandal? And have you neglected the solid Riches of divine Knowledge, and the important Matters of Religion and eternal Life? Or have you taken care *to hide a larger Portion of the Word of God in your Hearts* than others, *that you might not sin against him*? Have you treasured up more of the Truths, the Precepts, and the Promises of the Gospel? Does the *Word of Christ*

Christ dwell richly in you according to the Advice of the Apostle, *Colos. iii. 16*? Are you ready on every proper Occasion to entertain yourselves and your Friends with holy Communications, with Psalms and Hymns and spiritual Songs which have been laid up in your Hearts? Or have vain Rhymes and wanton Sonnets filled up and defiled that Cabinet of the Soul?

You *who are adorned with a good natural Temper*, who are ever ready to oblige and please, who have not so many of the Seeds of Malice and Envy in your Constitution as many of your Neighbours have, and in this respect may be said to have *more of natural Virtue than they*; O what a blessed Foundation is this upon which to raise an honourable Superstructure of Piety and moral Goodness? You have not so many vicious Qualities to subdue as others, and yet have you suffered Vice and unruly Passions to prevail as much in your Hearts? Have you been solicitous to adorn Religion with this amiable Character which God and Nature have given you? Have you brought this Offering to the Service of the Gospel? Have you maintained your Candor and Benevolence, your Charity and Goodness towards Mankind who converse with you? And have you made the Profession of Christianity appear illustrious in your Behaviour? Have you employed these good Dispositions

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of Nature to shine in the Kingdom of Grace, like Diamonds polished and set in a Ring of Gold? There is abundant Reason to expect you should do more Honour to Religion than others, who are bless'd with a Temper that so happily imitates Virtue and holy Love? But have you devoted this Blessing merely to earthly Friendships, and shewn your Compassion and Kindness to the Rest of the World, with a Neglect and Disdain of the Friends and Servants of God?

Reflect a little, my Friends, for what End did the God of Nature confer all these Blessings upon you! Did he mould you of such a happy Constitution in vain? Do you serve Sin and Sense, the Flesh and the Devil, and the common Offices of this perishing Life with these natural Talents and Advantages, and never think how much you might advance your eternal Interests by them? Do you never consider that you are obliged to serve *Jesus* your Lord with them, and to do more in the World for God than others? For God, who is the Spring and Fountain of all these Blessings, and has entrusted you with them for the Honour of his own Name?

VIII. *You who have been favoured with inward Workings of Heart toward God in your early Years,* you whose tender Consciences have been awakened betimes to a Sense of Sin, and have been convinced of your Guilt

and Danger by the blessed Spirit of God, you who have enjoyed many a holy Motion of this blessed Spirit upon your Souls, who have been brought often upon your Knees to the Throne of Grace to seek Pardon of Sin, Peace with God and eternal Life in your Days of Childhood, what eminent Advances in Religion should you have made before this Time? *What have you done more than others?* You who have been trained up almost from the Beginning of Life under the Instructions of God as well as the Instructions of Men, what Progress have you made answerable to these double and divine Advantages? You *who have tasted* betimes *that the Lord is gracious*, have you learnt to live upon his Grace? Or have you lost this Savour of Religion, and are grown careless of securing the Love of God to your Souls? Shall I address you in the Language of the Apostle, *Gal. iii. 3. having begun in the Spirit will ye end at last in the flesh?*

You who have learnt the first Lessons of Christianity long ago, and begun to practise them under the early Influence of inward Awakenings, what high Degrees have you acquired in the School of *Christ* above others? Have you learnt to obey the Spirit of God in all his Motions better than others? Are your Corruptions more entirely under Restraint; Are your native Sins more effectually subdued? Are your youthful Passions and
Appetites

Appetites better governed? Is your Delight in the Things of Religion risen higher than theirs? Is your Patience under Sufferings from the Hand of God more stedfast and exemplary, and your Meekness under Provocation from Men more conspicuous? Have you learnt more of the Practice of Compassion, Love and Tenderness to your Fellow Creatures, and especially to those who love God? What can you say concerning your Improvement in these Instances? Where are all the hopeful Appearances of Virtue and Godliness which rejoiced the Hearts of your pious and tender Parents, and gave Pleasure to all your Religious Acquaintance? Is your Goodness like that of *Ephraim, like the early Dew and a Morning Cloud that vanishes away?* Hosea vi. 4. Is there no Reason for God to upbraid you as he did his People *Israel* of old, *Jer. ii. 2. I remember the Kindness of thy Youth, the Love of thine Espousals, when thou followedst me in the Wilderness?* May not *Christ* send his Apostle to reprove you, O Backsliders, in the Language of *St. Paul* to the *Galatians*, *Ye did run well, who did hinder you that you should not obey the Truth?* What if God should pronounce concerning you that he would send his Spirit to strive with you no longer, and abandon you to the Madness and Folly of your own Hearts, and give you up to everlasting Wanderings?

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IX. You *who have been trained up as the Children of God under the divine Discipline of long or sharp Afflictions*, what have you done more for God than others, or what have you learnt more of inward Piety? The Apostle in the 12th Chapter to the *Hebrews* makes it appear that these fatherly Chastisements of God are of great Advantage to the Growth of Virtue, and considerably assist our Improvement in Godliness. 'Tis a Message of religious Profit, tho' it be a painful one: *As many as I love* (saith our Saviour) *I rebuke and chasten*, Rev. iii. 19. The Design of God in these afflictive Providences is *to make us Partakers of his Holiness*. Enquire then into your own Hearts, you who have had the Voice of the Rod joined together with the Voice of the Word, have you attended duly to the divine Warning, and obeyed him that speaks from Heaven! And have you found your Hearts wean'd from those Vices which your Heavenly Father designed to chasten and subdue?

You that have been long confin'd to Chambers of Sicknes, that have been *chastened upon your Beds with strong Pains*, and have felt the Tabernacle often tottering and ready to fall into the Dust, have you yet learnt Silence and Submission to the Hand of God? Have you learned *Obedience by the Things which you have suffered* in Conformity to *Jesus the Son of God*? Are you more wean'd from this World
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and the Love of Life, who have been so often upon the Borders of the Grave? Are you more prepared for Death than those who never came within the Views of it? Has every severe Shock of Nature made you examine the Truth and Evidence of your Grace, so that you have acquired a more solid and well-grounded Hope? Are you more thankful than others for some little Measures of Health which you enjoy, and more solicitous to improve every Inch of Time and every Hour of Ease to some valuable Purposes?

Have not some of us frequently seen Death entering into our own Dwellings, or into the House of our Friends? Have we yet learned to die? And are we prepared to meet that last Enemy better than those who never have been so near him? Have we learned to part with our Friends without so much Discomposure as others manifest, since we have had frequent Occasion to make use of the Consolations of the Gospel on this Account? Do we live more upon God an Everliving and Almighty Friend? Has the cutting off the Streams of Blessings amongst the Creatures made us dwell more at the Fountain, and abide nearer to God?

Perhaps some of you may have been smitten in your Estate, and have lost a considerable Part of your Substance in the World; you have been reduced it may be from plentiful Circumstances to a more scanty

scanty Diet, to coarser Cloathing and a meaner Appearance, and are deprived of some of the Conveniences of Life; have you learnt to live without them with an easy and peaceful Heart? Is your Spirit wean'd from those Grandures or showish Appearances of Life which are by no means necessary to true Happiness? Are you able to say with St. Paul, Philip. iv. 12. *I know both how to be abased and how to abound; every where and in all Things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry; for I have learnt in whatsoever State I am therewith to be content.*

Or perhaps you have been trained up all your Days in strait Circumstances, you have laboured hard to support Nature, and you have been freed from the Temptations that attend Riches and Grandure; have you learnt to live without Envy against the rich and the great, Envy the natural Vice of Mortals in mean Circumstances? Have you depended on the Providence of God for your daily Bread on Earth, and learnt this holy Lesson of Faith? Have you taken so much the more Care to secure to yourselves Treasures in Heaven that never fade, and the Bread that nourishes to eternal Life? Are you among the Number of those who are humble and lowly as your Circumstances require? Have you been taught to be poor in Spirit? You have had but few Temptations to Pride, have you therefore more effectually

effectually subdued this common Iniquity of Nature? Ye have tasted few of the Charms of this World, and have had no strong Allurements to Earth, is your Heart therefore more loose from earthly Things? Is your Substance laid up in Heaven, and are your *Affections set on Things that are on high?* Have you any solid Evidences that your Name is written among the Number of those *who are poor in this World, rich in Faith, and Heirs of the Kingdom?*

Are there any of the Sorrows or Difficulties that any of us have passed thro' in this World that have made us more eminently fit for a better? Have any of the afflicting Strokes of the Hand of God made a sensible Separation between us and our Idols? Or are we found in that Rank of Men of whom the Prophet speaks in the Name of God, *Jer. ii. 30. In vain have I smitten your Children, they have received no Correction:* and whom the Prophet complains of to God himself, *Jer. vi. 3. O Lord, thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive Instruction; they have made their Faces harder than a Rock, they have refused to return?* What if the Blessed God should cast us out of his Fatherly Care, and say in the Words in which he taught the Prophet *Isaiab* to address the Jews, *Why should you be stricken any more? Ye will revolt more and more.*

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How dreadful would the Case be, if God should give us up to our own Hearts Lusts, without any further instance of Paternal Discipline and Love? What if he should pronounce in his Wrath as he did against a degenerated People by the Prophet *Hosea*, Chap. iv. 17. *Ephraim is joined to Idols, let him alone*: Let him run on in the Course of his Iniquity till he has made himself ripe for utter Destruction.

There is no painful Stroke of Providence but carries with it an awakening Voice: And if we have been often smitten with the Rod, we have received so many fresh Warnings from Heaven; What are become of all these Warnings? Are they lost, forgotten and cast behind our Back? *Have we endured so many Things in vain, if it be indeed in vain?*

SECTION VII.

Of the special Obligations to Piety which lie upon some Persons of all Parties above others.

HAVING finished the general Head of *Advantages* which some Chirstians of all Parties enjoy above others, I proceed in the next Place to consider what *special Obligations* lie on some Chirstians beyond others to practise Religion toward God,

God, and Goodness toward Men, and to enquire whether such Persons as lie under these Obligations have made answerable Improvements.

I. You *who enjoy easy and comfortable Circumstances in the World*, who are blest with Riches, or have at least a very happy Sufficiency to answer all the Cravings of Nature without the everlasting and anxious Cares of *What shall I eat, or what shall I drink, and wherewith shall I be cloathed?* What have you done for God more than others?

I will not, I dare not say, that the great Things of this World are a certain *Advantage* to Piety, for Riches are *sometimes kept for the Owners to their Hurt*; they frequently become Temptations to Pride and Vanity of Mind, to the mirthful Extravagances and the Follies of Life, and lead away the Soul too often to forget God; yet this I may venture to say, that the comfortable Circumstances of this Life are not in their own Nature Snares to the Soul, but they are always *an Obligation* which God lays upon his Creatures to raise a Revenue of Glory for him, and in a way of Gratitude to do more for his Name in the World than others. *Honour the Lord with thy Substance, and with the first Fruits of thine Increase, Prov. iii. 9.* Tho' Riches may become a Snare if they are unblest, yet they also may be improved
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to blessed Purposes in Religion, and enable us to do much for God. Are you among the Number of those *who are rich in this World, and are you also rich in good Works*, which is the Charge of St. Paul to the Christians of his Day who enjoyed a larger Share of the Blessings of this Life? *1 Tim. vi. 17, 18.* Do the Lips, and the Hearts, and the Bowels of the Poor bless your Name, and give Thanks to God on your Behalf? Do the Churches of *Christ* acknowledge your Bounty for the Support of the common Interest of *Christ* and his Gospel? Does your Liberality and Benevolence in all proper Instances of Piety and Charity bear a Proportion to the Treasures with which God has intrusted you? *What have you done more than others*, whom the great God hath made Stewards of a larger Heap of his earthly Blessings?

II. You *who have received great and remarkable Deliverances from Death or Misery, or Mischief of any kind, by the favourable Providence of God*, you that have escaped imminent Dangers by Fire, by Water, in travelling by Land or Sea, have you offered all due Acknowledgements to the kind and Almighty Guardian of your Life and Peace? Do you remember how frequently David devotes himself to God after every fresh Deliverance, how he engages himself in Love, and blesses the Name of the Lord for ever,

ever, and what a Multitude of Psalms he has written with this very Design? And can your Consciences declare what are the thankful Returns that you have made to the God of your Lives and your Mercies? *What have you done beyond others* who never tasted the Pleasure of such Salvations? What sacred and lasting Influence have any of these Providences left upon your Hearts?

You who have been on the very Borders of the Grave, and ready to enter into the invisible World, under the Terrors of a guilty Conscience, and utterly unprepared to die, and yet God has commanded the Grave to shut its Mouth again, and respited your Life from going down to the Pit for a longer Season, have you taken any new Care to prepare for Death, that when the next Sickness comes you may not be surrounded with the same Horrors? Or are you as careless of your eternal Interests, as thoughtless of God and Religion and the Concerns of your Soul as you were before, or as others are who never enjoyed such a Warning? What is become of all those keen Terrors that seized you on the Brink of the Grave? What is become of your Tears and Mournings, your Vows and Resolutions, and your holy Promises if God would spare you but a few Years longer? What? Are they all vanished together with your Sickness? Was

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the

the Wound of your Heart healed so slightly as to leave no Remembrance upon your Thoughts, and no happy Effects in your Life? Are you no better than your former evil Companions? no better than you yourselves were before this Affliction and Deliverance? Are you returned again to your old Iniquities, to your Neglect of Duties and your Forgetfulness of God? Surely the next Message you may expect from Heaven is the sudden Stroke of Death without any Opportunity for Prayer or Season for Repentance.

III. You *who are fixed in any special Station of superior Influence upon others*, as *Parents*, as *Governors of Families*, as *Ministers*, as *Instructors of Youth*, as *Men of Honour and Reputation*, of Rank and Character among your Neighbours, 'tis expected that you should do more than others.

Are you a *Parent*, and have you brought Children into the World tainted with the common Corruption of human Nature, have you derived to them vicious Inclinations from *Adam* the first Transgressor, and are you not under the strongest Obligations to seek the Renewal of their Nature by divine Grace? Are they come into this World by your Means, under the unhappy Circumstances of Mankind, as *Criminals* and *Strangers to God*, and do you not feel
yourselves

yourself under powerful Engagements to bring them acquainted with the God that made them, and lead them into the Methods of his Love? Do you think yourselves bound to provide Food and Raiment for them, because you are the Instruments of bringing them into this mortal State, and under these Necessities of Nature; and are you not as much obliged to take Care of their immortal Interests, since you are also the Occasion of bringing their Souls into being? For when a Son of *Adam* is born according to the common Law of Nature, there is an immortal Creature brought into Existence, and a Life of eternal Duration is begun. You who have taken some Care daily, that your Children should be early acquainted with the common Affair of this perishing Life, but have you been as deeply solicitous to acquaint them with the Concerns of their Immortality? Have you sought out any tender Moments of Address to impress their Consciences with an awful Sense of God and Religion? to let them know their Sin and Danger in a State of Nature, and to lead them to *Jesus* the only Saviour of Souls? Have you watched the Moments when they have begun to manifest the first young Efforts of Reason, and have you then endeavoured to make them sensible of the important Things of Religion, and

proceeded by Degrees as their Age would bear, to lead them into a larger Knowledge of Truth and Duty? Have you taken notice of those Seasons when their Consciences have been first uneasy under a Sense of Sin, and endeavoured to improve that Conviction, and to carry on the Work of God? You have taught them, and they have learnt to know their own natural Wants of Food and Raiment, and Relief under Pain, and to address their Parents on Earth for Supplies: And have you never let them know what their spiritual Wants are, nor instructed them in plain and easy Language to ask a Supply of their Father who is in Heaven?

You have greater Advantages for this Purpose than Ministers or Teachers of any kind: The Fondness of a *Mother's* Love, and the Authority of a *Father's* Voice, mixed with becoming Tenderness, are suited to make deep and lasting Impressions upon their Off-spring in early Years: Have your Parental Love and Authority been duly employed to this divine Purpose? Have you endeavoured to diffuse the Knowledge of God among your younger Household, and have you made perpetual and fervent Addresses to the God of all Grace upon their Account? Have your secret Chambers been Witnesses of your Wrestlings with God in Prayer for their Salvation? and besides all
this,

this, have you set before them a bright Example of Piety and Virtue in your own Behaviour? Have the Lessons which you have taught them by your own Practice happily concurred with the Instructions of your Lips to train them up for God and Heaven? What can you say, my Friends, to such Enquiries as these? Have you been faithful to this Trust, and have you done any Thing answerable to these high Engagements? Or have you only brought these Infants into a World of Sin and Sorrow, and taken no Thought nor Pains to make them holy and happy? Have you introduced them into a State of immortal Existence, and yet employed no Care nor Labour to render that Existence happy, and to bring them up for the Blessedness of Heaven? Is not this what you owe to your young Off-spring, and to your own Character as Parents?

I should here address all *Governors of Families*, as well as Parents, and those whose Business it is to teach and instruct Children, or who take Servants into their House. You provide the Conveniencies of this Life for Servants, and ought you not to have some Care of their Souls as well as of your own? 'Tis the honourable Character that God himself gave *Abraham*, Gen. xviii. 19. *I know Abraham that he will command his Children and his Household after him, and they*

shall keep the Way of the Lord: And his Servants as well as his Sons were circumcised and entered into the Bond of the Covenant. Where servants are instructed and admonished by their Superiors with that just Tenderness and Respect as Creatures made of the same Flesh and Blood, there may be much done to win them to *Christ*; and where there appears a hearty Sollicitude for the Welfare of their Souls and their highest Interest, they are not always such untractable Creatures as to refuse the Assistance that a Master or Mistress might give them in the way to Heaven: And remember this Assistance comes with a double Influence upon the Hearts and Consciences of those that are under your Government, when the mingled Principles of Authority and Love join in religious Advice.

Here I might address *Magistrates* with a warm Enquiry, *What do you more than others?* But we have few of that Character who attend our separate Assemblies. I might Address *Ministers* in the same Language, who are eminently intrusted with the Care of Souls; but while each of us are engaged in fulfilling our own proper Posts of Service, we have but very little Opportunity of giving or receiving such mutual Advices in our publick Ministry. Yet would I not suffer this Moment for to pass
away

away without renewing the Enquiry upon my own Conscience, *What do I more than others?* And in pressing the solemn Charge upon my own Heart of behaving in all my Ministrations, and all my Studies, as becomes one that is interested in the Care of immortal Souls.

IV. *You who have given your selves up to Christ by a solemn and publick Profession of his Name, and have joined your selves to the Lord in his visible Church, to partake of the special Ordinances of the Gospel, What do ye more than others?* You have declared to the World in a solemn Manner, that you have listed your selves under the Banner of *Christ*, that you have taken up Arms against Sin and every Enemy of your Salvation, and that you are become the Disciples of the meek and holy *Jesus*, what have you done answerable to these solemn Engagements, beyond those who have lived more at large, who have walked at a Loose from all such sacred Bonds? The Vows of God are upon you, and you have recognized your Obligations to be the Lord's: Have you had your Conversation in the World like the covenanted Servants of *Christ*? Have you kept yourselves at a Distance from the Defilements of the World, as a People purchased by the Blood of the Son of God, and devoted to his Faith and Love? Have you learnt to be

meek and holy, and harmless, and full of Compassion to Men, and zealous for the Honour of God as *Jesus* your Master was? Why do ye call him *Lord and Master*, if you practise not the Rules of his Advice, nor imitate his divine Pattern?

You have often joined in the publick Worship of God as your God thro' *Christ Jesus* your great Mediator, and what have you gained by all these Seasons of Devotion? Are you brought nearer to God than others? Are you made fitter after every such sacred Season to join the worshipping Assembly in Heaven?

You who have often been Partakers of the blessed Institution of the Lord's Supper, and by this Means lie under powerful Obligations, and enjoy special Advantages for Holiness, *What do ye more than others?* His holy Supper is provided for the Exercise and Establishment of your Faith on a crucified *Christ*: It is appointed for raising and inflaming your Love to God the Father, in sending his Son to die for you, and to *Jesus* the Son in submitting to Death for your Sakes: It is designed to encourage and advance your everlasting Hope, and your holy Joy in the Lord; and 'tis given you also to represent and to promote your Union and Love to all Fellow Christians, and to lay you under the strongest and most solemn Engagements

Engagements to fulfil all the Duties of Christianity. Shall I intreat you to enquire into the Frame of your Hearts, and to look back on your Behaviour in Life? Are these holy and happy Ends of so sacred an Ordinance in any Measure obtained by you in a higher Degree than those who have no Opportunity to enjoy it, or no Inclination to attend it? Is your Faith in a dying Saviour established so, that you can say, you will venture *to live and die by the Faith of the Son of God*? Is your Love kindled into a higher Flame to him who died for you? Is your Hope more confirm'd? Is your View of heavenly Things where *Jesus* is at the Father's Right Hand, more constantly maintained? And do ye walk in the Joy of the Lord? Do ye feel the powerful Influence of these holy Solemnities engaging you to a more undaunted Profession of the Name of *Christ*, and the Practice of every Duty toward God and Man? Do you find your Hearts more united to your Fellow Christians in Love, by communicating with them in the same Bread and drinking of the same Cup, and by this Emblem of your visible Union to one Head even *Christ Jesus*? Are you animated to fulfil difficult Services by these Heavenly Refreshments? Do you find your Souls nourished by this Bread of Life? Are you strengthened to

bear the Fatigues of the Christian Soldier, and supported by these holy Cordials under the daily Trials and Troubles of Mortality? You ought to think with yourselves, “To what purpose have I eat and drunk so often at the Table of the Lord, if my Religion be still in a starving Way? How little Influence have all these sacred Vows and Engagements had upon me, if I suffer myself to neglect Duty or be defiled with Sin as often as those who never partake of this Entertainment? And think also what a shameful Discouragement you give to those who begin to set their Faces toward *Zion*, if an Inhabitant of *Zion*, a Member of a Christian Church, has not something more heavenly about him than those who have not yet separated themselves from this World.

V. *You who have had long and large Experience of the Goodness and Grace of God thro’ the whole Course of Life, and are now arrived at a good old Age, and drawing near to Death and Eternity, What do ye more than others? Do not the invisible Things of a future State appear to you in a fairer and stronger Light when you are brought so near them? And have they not more constant Influence upon your Heart and Life? You who have so often tasted that the Lord is gracious, and have seen so often the Interposures of his Providence*

Providence to save you from threatening Dangers, and the glorious Accomplishments of his Promises in the many Occurrences of the Christian Life, are you better acquainted with the Worth of these Promises, and more ready to trust them upon every new Difficulty? Have you learned to live upon a naked Promise more than others, and to expect all from God, when you see new Distress arising, and the Help of Creatures failing you? Do you make it your Business to encourage younger Christians to walk onward in the way of Faith and Holiness, and that sometimes by telling them what you yourself have seen and felt of the Grace of the Lord, as well as what you have read and heard of it in his Gospel? Do ye invite, animate and comfort the younger Disciples in the School of *Christ* at proper Seasons, and say, *Come all ye that fear and love the Lord, and I will tell you what he has done for my Soul?* Are the many Condescensions of divine Mercy to you entirely forgotten? Is the Remembrance of the various Instances of his Grace lost out of your Minds? Do ye stagger at every new Difficulty? Are you frightened at every fresh Trial? Have ye been trained up in the School of *Christ* so long, and learnt so many Lessons of Faith and Godliness, and are ye still beginning again, still learning the first Principles of Duty and

Hope? What have ye done with all your Experiences of the Favours of Heaven and the rich Grace of *Christ*?

You *whose tottering Tabernacles give you notice that they are ready to fall into the Dust*, have you attained a greater Assurance of the *Building of God not made with Hands, that is reserved in Heaven for you?* Have you learnt to say with holy Triumph, *We know that if this earthly House be dissolved, there is a nobler Habitation waiting for us on high?* Have you this heavenly Inheritance always in View and Hope, and are you ready to be dislodged from your Dwelling on Earth, that you may dwell with *Christ* in Haven? *Are ye confident and willing rather to be absent from the Body, and to be present with the Lord, and that upon just and solid Grounds?* O 'tis high Time for you who are so near to Eternity, to get your whole Souls loosened from the little Affairs of this mortal State? You who make daily Approaches to Heaven, 'tis time to be weaned from every Thing on Earth, and be dead to all that is not divine: You should begin as it were to put on the Vestments of Paradise and Immortality, and to diffuse a Savour of the Holiness and the Joy of that Place round about you, and let the World know that you are near to God. Or can you wear out whole Days and Weeks together, and never speak of *Christ*, of Heaven,

Heaven, of the Pleasures at the Right Hand of God, and the Happiness to be found in his Presence? And do you suffer this little Remnant of Life to wear out daily without some Efforts for the Honour of your heavenly Father and your Saviour? Can you pass your Time away amongst Men, and walk busily about their Affairs without any lively or joyful Thoughts of the Business and the Blessedness of the Saints on high, and *the Spirits of the just made perfect*? Are you so near to the Place where God and his Son *Jesus* dwell in their brightest Glories, and say nothing of them to your Friends round about you? So near the Borders of the upper World, and yet cleave to the Dust as others do, and discover as much Attachment to earthly Things, as those who are in the midst of mortal Amusements, and in the Vigour of human Life? If this be your Temper still, what Apology can be made for you? what Pretence of an Excuse? How much do you dishonour Religion in old Age, and disgrace the Profession of Fifty or Threescore Years?

You who have walked with God so long thro' this Wilderness, and have been fed and clothed and supported all the Way, who have been delivered from many Enemies and many Dangers, from Fires and Waters, and Perils of every kind, who have been

carried

carried thro' Multitudes of Difficulties, and made to triumph over huge Temptations, and have had rich Experiences of the Grace and Mercy of God thro' all your Pilgrimage, can you not rejoice in him, trust him in this last Stage of Life, and venture thro' Death and the Grave leaning upon his Arm? Have you so often committed your Souls into the Hands of your blessed Redeemer while they dwell here in Flesh, and can you not commit your Souls with holy Cheerfulness and Joy into the same Hands when you are departing from those Regions of Flesh and Blood, and entering upon the Paradise of God thro' the dark Valley? Can you not say with the holy Psalmist, *Psalms lxxi. 20. Thou hast done great Things for me, O God, who is like unto thee? Thou hast shewed me great and sore Troubles, and given me many a Salvation, thou shalt quicken me again even from the Dust of Death, thou shalt bring me again from the Depths of the Earth; my God will redeem my Soul from the Power of the Grave, for he shall receive me.* Has he carried you thro' six Troubles, and cannot you venture yourself under his Conduct and Care to pass thro' the seventh at the appointed Hour, and to make the Number of your Victories and Salvations compleat? We hope you have taught younger Christians to live and walk with God,

God, by your exemplary Behaviour and heavenly Conversation, and will you not also teach them to die, by rousing your Faith into an active Vigour, and raising your Courage high at the Gates of Death and the Borders of Glory? What will the World say, this sinful and unbelieving World? And what will younger Christians be ready to say, if they observe such as you are, cast down and overwhelmed with tumultuous Fears at the approaching Hour of your Departure, when you have all along professed to the World how divine a Support your Religion contains in it against all the Terrors of Death and the Grave?

SECTION VIII.

Persuasives to superior Virtue and Piety.

BEFORE I entirely finish this Discourse, perhaps it may not be amiss to mention a few *Motives* or *persuasive Arguments* to awaken and excite you to improve in Religion and Virtue proportionably to all your *Advantages* and *Obligations*. I confess, throughout the Train of my Discourse I have given frequent Hints of this kind already, and therefore I shall mention but a few, and shall be more brief in the Proposal of them.

I. If

I. If your Practice of sincere Godliness bear no Proportion to the Obligation you lie under, and to the Advantages you have enjoyed, *you will disappoint the just and reasonable Expectations of God, Angels, and Men concerning you.* 'Tis true indeed, the blessed God, who foreknows all Things from the Beginning, cannot be really disappointed in a proper Sense, by any Occurrences among the Children of Men: But he is pleased often to condescend in his Word, to talk with us after the Manner of Men, in order to awaken us to Diligence, to Watchfulness, and to an Improvement of our Blessings to some answerable Purposes in Religion. So he argues the Case concerning the unfruitful Nation of *Israel*, whom he called and chose to be his own People, *Isai. v. 3, 4, &c. What could have been done more to my Vineyard that I have not done in it? When I looked that it should bring forth Grapes, wherefore did it bring forth wild Grapes?* The ever blessed God complains here of his People like a Vine-Dresser disappointed of his Hopes.

Again, *Angels expect it of you*, for they are Ministers of many a Favour of God to you: They are Witnesses of your Privileges and your Obligations; they rejoice at your Conversion to God, and at your Growth in Holiness, and at every Victory you obtain; but perhaps you give them Occasion to carry
many

many a melancholy Message concerning you to their Lord in Heaven, melancholy Messages indeed of abused Privileges and broken Obligations. There are Seasons when the Sons of God who are sent thro' the Earth come to present themselves before the Lord, and give an Account of their Commission, and your Conduct, *Job. i. 6.* O may you furnish those heavenly Ministers with constant Matter of joyful Tidings to the Throne!

And let me add further, *Men expect it of you*, both the good and the bad: Every one that observes what *Advantages* you enjoy for Godliness, and what special *Obligations* you lie under, expects to see some Fruits of Holiness answerable to your Profession, and to the Cultivation which Heaven has bestowed upon you. Your Fellow Christians would rejoice to see your Religion in a flourishing State, and the ungodly World *watch for your halting*, and stand ready to cover your Names with Reproach if you fail in your Duty. But this leads to a second *Motive*.

II. If you neglect to improve your Obligations and Advantages, *you will give a scandalous and mournful Occasion to the Wicked to speak Evil of the Ways of God and Godliness*: They will be ready to cry out, "This Religion and Virtue has nothing in it, for the
" strictest

“ strictest Professors of it shamefully fail in
 “ their Duty.” And as every Party of
 Christians suppose themselves to have some
 peculiar Advantages, you will give Occa-
 sion to every different Sect and Party, to
 throw Disgrace upon your particular Pro-
 fession, if you pretend to more than others,
 and practise less. “ What are these People
 “ who would have us believe, that their
 “ Advantages for Improvement of Holi-
 “ nefs are superior to that of their Neigh-
 “ bours? Are these the Persons that possess
 “ Privileges above the rest of the World,
 “ and yet make no higher Advances in Vir-
 “ tue or Purity of Life, and have as little
 “ of Sobriety, or Honesty, or of Religion
 “ in them as their Neighbours?”

III. Unless you improve the Blessings you
 enjoy for the Purposes of Godliness, *you will
 forget all these Blessings, these peculiar Advan-
 tages for Religion, and provoke a righteous God
 to remove them.* This was the Case with
Jerusalem, the City that was beloved and
 favoured of God with his own Presence,
 above all the Cities of the Earth, and whi-
 ther he sent his own Son from Heaven with
 a special Commission of Grace and Peace to
 the numerous Inhabitants of it: But they
 had abused all their Mercies, they had mis-
 improved all their Privileges, and forfeited
 all the Favours of a condescending God;
 and

and therefore the Son of God himself pronounced their Destruction, tho' at the same Time he wept over the rebellious City, and shed Tears of Pity at the Thoughts of their Ruin : *Luke xix. 41. Matt. xxiii. 37. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou who killest the Prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy Children together, even as a Hen gathers her Chickens under her Wings, and ye would not ? Behold your House is left unto you desolate : If thou hadst known in this thy Day, (i. e. in this last Message which God has sent thee by me his Son) if thou hadst known the Things that belong to thy Peace ! But now they are hid from thine Eyes, &c.* The same sort of Threatning is pronounced against the chief Priests and Elders of the People, *Matth. xxi. 41, 42, &c.* The Gospel of the Son of God was preached to them, and rejected by them, *Therefore I say unto you, the Kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a Nation bringing forth the Fruits thereof.* Some of the primitive Christian Churches who enjoyed glorious Advantages had such a Sentence of Forfeiture threatned and executed upon them, *Rev. ii. 5. Remember from whence thou art fallen, O Church of Ephesus, and repent and do the first Works ; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy Candlestick out of his Place, i. e. will dissolve thy Church,*
and

and deprive thee of all holy Ordinances, which was done effectually in the Course of punishing Providence.

And in our Day, we Christians in *Great Britain*, by neglecting to improve our Advantages, may provoke God to take away his Gospel from amongst us, by permitting a Spirit of Apostacy and Infidelity to overrun the whole Nation. We *Protestants* may endanger the Loss of our Reformation by such impious Negligence, and expose ourselves in the Providence of God to some dreadful and bloody Desolation, whereby we may be given up to Idolatry, Superstition, and Tyranny. We *Dissenters* by the Mis-Improvement of our present Privileges and Peace, may forfeit these Mercies into the Hands of a righteous God: And tho' no Authority of Man can justly deprive us of our Liberty to worship God according to the Dictates of our own Consciences, so long as we pay proper Duties to the State, yet in the Course of Providence, a just God may suffer some unrighteous and cruel Faction to arise in the Land, which may prevail to the Ruin of our Liberties, to the Destruction of our Peace, and to the Shame and Scandal of a *Protestant* Kingdom.

I might upon this Head address my self particularly to those of every Party who enjoy any special Advantages above their
Fellows,

Fellows, and neglect to improve them. What if God should bereave us of the Advice of religious Parents, the Assistance of pious Friends, the affecting and happy Ministry of useful Preachers, the Conveniencies of Retirement and a Closet, Leisure and Seasons for religious Worship, or any other Privileges whatsoever, whereby our Souls might have made Advancement in their Way to Heaven? What if in the Course of his Dispensations in the World, he should bring us into Circumstances of powerful Temptation? What if he should cast our Lot in wicked Families, or take away all Opportunities of publick Worship? What if he should confine us to Beds of Sickness, and visit us with a Variety of Distresses of every kind? Such Sufferings may give us a painful Remembrance and bitter Resentment of our criminal Abuse of former Mercies.

Or what if our Rebellion against the Dictates of Conscience, and our frequent Resistance of the good Motions of God's holy Spirit, should provoke him to withdraw all those kind and heavenly Influences, and to give us up to the Hardness of our own Hearts? What if Conscience should grow stupid and senseless and reprove no more? What if the World and Spirit of God should call and invite us no more? What if we should be left to our own Folly and Madness, abandoned

abandoned to the Power and Tyranny of our own Iniquities, and run on without Restraint or Remorse to the dreadful Precipice of Eternity, till we fall into the Pit of Fire and Darkness whence there is no Redemption?

IV. If you neglect to live answerable to the Privileges which you enjoy, and the Bonds which lie upon you, *your Guilt will be aggravated, and your final Condemnation en-
kaunc'd in Proportion to these neglected Obligations, and to these abused Advantages.* Thus it was with the Towns of *Chorazin* and *Capernaum*, wherein our Saviour had preached his Divine Doctrine, and wrought many mighty Works, *Matth. xi. 20—24.* *It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon, two Heathen Cities, and even for Sodom and Gomorrah, those Places of abominable Wickedness, in the Day of Judgment, than for the Inhabitants of Galilee, who had abused such heavenly Privileges.* Think of this, O Christian; there is a Day coming when every Advantage thou hast enjoyed shall appear to have been a Talent that thou must account for; every Obligation that thou liest under to Virtue and Godliness shall be brought into the Account: And how terrible will that Scene be, if all these Privileges, Trusts and Engagements shall appear before the Eyes of God, Angels, and Men, to have been
wretchedly

wretchedly mis-improved by thy Negligence? That awful Hour is hast'ning upon us, when the Lord *Jesus Christ* in flaming Fire, and upon a Throne of Judgment, shall repeat the same Question to us *Christians*, to us *Protestants*, to us *Inhabitants of Great-Britain*, and to us *profeß Dissenters*, *What have you done more than others?* And the Voice from the Tribunal shall carry in it another Sort of Accent and Majesty than that in which it was pronounced heretofore in his Sermon on the Mount. Let each of us think with our selves what Answer we shall be able to make to such a Voice of solemn and dreadful Enquiry, if we cannot now give a tolerable Answer when our Ministers or our own Consciences put the same Question to us. What Tremblings will seize our Souls, what Horror overwhelm our guilty Consciences, if all these Advantages and these Obligations in the fearful Review shall serve only to aggravate the condemning Sentence, and shall lay us under tenfold Punishment from Heaven? How dreadful will be the Anguish of Conscience in that Day, when we shall find ourselves condemned without Remedy!

V. The last Motive I shall mention is of a more gentle and alluring kind. *Talents and Advantages well improved are the Way to obtain still greater Advantages on Earth, and will*

will increase your Crown of Righteousness and your everlasting Reward in Heaven. Matth. xiii. 12. Whosoever hath, and has improved what he enjoys, to him shall something further be given, and he shall have more abundant Advantage; and Luke xix. 16, 17, &c. He that received ten Talents, and improved them wisely, was made Ruler over ten Cities: He that had two Talents was made Governor of two, while the unprofitable Servant who bound up his Talent in a Napkin, and made no use of it, was dispossessed of what he enjoyed, and was driven into everlasting Darkness and Misery, where there is Weeping and Wailing and gnashing of Teeth, Matth. xxv. 30.

You who profess to traffick for the Riches of Heaven, have you no Ambition in you to be possessed of some of the superior Treasures, to be raised to the sublimer Glories there, and shine among the brighter and larger Stars? *One Star will differ from another in Glory, 1 Cor. xv. 41.* And they who not only arrive at Heaven themselves, but lead others thither too, shall be arrayed in superior Splendors, *Dan. xii. 3.* You who are Racers in this holy State of Christianity, have you no Desire to gain some of the first and brightest Prizes? There are Crowns laid up for the Righteous of different Weight and Lustre, in the Hands of Jesus the final Judge, and *he will reward every one accord-*
ing

ing to his Work : Those who have many Talents intrusted with them here on Earth, have an Opportunity put into their Hands of obtaining some of the nobler Prizes in Heaven, and of wearing some of the brighter Crowns. Let each of us then say to ourselves, “ Open thine Eyes, O my Soul, “ and take a just and wise Survey what are “ thy Talents, what are thy Advantages : “ Has thy improvement in divine Know- “ ledge, thy Advances in Grace, thy su- “ perior Practices of Virtue and Piety been “ proportionable to the Blessings and Pri- “ vileges that God has conferred upon thee ? “ Awake at this Voice of Warning ! A- “ wake, and bethink thy self, and mourn for “ thy former Sloth, for thy shameful Ne- “ gligence, for thy Dulness in the Christian “ Race, and all thine Abuse of the Favours “ of Heaven : Awaken all thy active “ Powers, and press forward with new Zeal “ and Activity : Strive to answer all the “ Demands of thy high and holy and hea- “ venly Calling, and of the peculiar Ad- “ vantages which thou hast enjoyed, that “ when *Jesus* thy Judge, shall at last re- “ peat this solemn Question, *What hast* “ *thou done more than others ?* thy Tongue “ and thy Conscience may give a happy “ Account of thy past Behaviour : Then “ shalt thou receive this blessed Sentence

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“ from the Lips of thy Lord, *Well done good*
“ *and faithful Servant*, thou hast been faith-
“ ful to the many Obligations under which
“ I laid thee, thou hast improved the nu-
“ merous Talents and Advantages with
“ which I intrusted thee in the Days of thy
“ Flesh ; here, take thou from my Hands
“ one of these fairer Crowns, and ascend
“ thou into some of the higher Regions of
“ Immortality and Blessedness. *Amen.* ”

The End.

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